











# EFFECTIVE COLLECTION METHODS

A SYSTEMATIC TREATMENT OF COLLECTIONS IN MARKETING,  
INCLUDING CONSTRUCTIVE CREDITS, PSYCHOLOGY OF COLLECT-  
ING, PROCEDURE AND SYSTEM, INSTALMENT COLLECTING,  
LEGAL ASPECTS AND THE PRINCIPLE OF RESALE

By

EDWARD HALL GARDNER

Author of "Effective Business Letters"; formerly  
Professor of Business Administration, University  
of Wisconsin

and

FRANK A. FALL

Past Director, National Institute of Credit,  
National Association of Credit Men

REVISED EDITION

THE RONALD PRESS COMPANY  
NEW YORK

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*Fourth Printing, July 1939*

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

## PREFACE

The object of this book is to show the most effective methods of making collections, and the principles underlying their success. The acid test has been applied to the methods presented. They have been drawn from the business practice of the best organizations. The soundness of the principles has been proved by their ability to produce results—in some cases astounding results—wherever skilfully and energetically applied.

From beginning to end, the book attempts to show that one of the fundamental mistakes in collecting is to regard it as in any sense a matter of clerical routine, an automatic selection of form letters, or a blind "system." No one who persists in such points of view should expect to win, under pressure of the debtor's other uses for funds, in competition with the many skilled collection strategists who on the contrary have realized that their function is a constructive one, that they have an important part to play in the marketing plans of their houses, and who while they are handling each day's problems are constantly using the principle of resale, selling and reselling credit, shrewdly adapting their procedure to the varying stages of the collection process, and by diplomatic handling securing payment where irritating tactics would get nowhere. Effective collecting of this kind is not a simple matter, but an absorbing and fascinating study, involving a broad understanding of the objects of the business organization. No man thoroughly understands his business problems until he has re-examined them in the light of these principles.

It is this kind of collecting with which this book deals. The psychology of the delinquent customer is analyzed, and the use of various effective appeals illustrated by extracts from the entire range of interviews and correspondence used in modern houses. The procedure of collection is fully treated

and illustrated. Office system for collection departments is covered in detail. As a great proportion of collecting is done by mail, exhaustive treatment is given to the management and psychology of collection correspondence, giving complete letters and extracts selected from many thousands of letters, showing just how each situation is handled. Instalment collecting, outside collection agencies, collection by telephone and telegraph, procedure in special types of business, and legal aspects of collecting are all included in the book. The methods cover both collecting accounts between business houses and personal debts from the individual consumer.

The first edition of the book was the work of Edward H. Gardner alone, at the time Associate Professor of Business Administration at the University of Wisconsin. "New Collection Methods," as the volume was called, was an immediate success, proving beyond a doubt the validity and the practical importance of his clear statements and analysis of the principle of resale, the definite recognition of six distinct stages in collection, and credit as the key to the collection problem. To the revision of the original work, Dr. Frank A. Fall, for years Director of the National Institute of Credit, National Association of Credit Men, brought the benefits of much experience and of nation-wide contacts in the credit field. In this printing all material has been brought up to date. The user may be assured that in the present work he has the best information developed by American business.

The combined contacts of the authors are so wide that detailed acknowledgment to all the hundreds of business men, organizations, and credit managers who have contributed to the work would be impracticable within the limits of space. Numerous such references appear throughout the volume. Beyond this, grateful acknowledgment is again made to all the organizations and individuals who have made this book possible.

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# **EFFECTIVE COLLECTION METHODS**



## CHAPTER 1

### CREDIT AND COLLECTION FOUNDATIONS

**What Credit Means to Business.**—Modern business executives, whether concerned with production or distribution, are chiefly interested in the *use* rather than the history or the philosophy of the credit principle. Most of them are so busy dealing with the facts, figures, and concrete problems of the daily routine that they have little time to delve into theory.

They recognize, however, three important mile-posts of economic history: that the earliest exchange of commodities was on the basis of barter; that money, in one form or another, came in to take the place of barter; and that credit has, in all the civilized countries of the world, to a very large extent replaced money. Beyond these simple facts many executives never go, and possibly there is no great need for them to do so.

But no man can get far in business today who does not at least realize the vital importance of credit and understand the basic principles of its use. This power to obtain goods or services on promise of future payment has become the very life-blood of business. It is the basis of from 70 to 75 per cent of all retail and probably close to 95 per cent of all wholesale transactions. It influences not only the economic status of individuals, firms, and corporations but also the destinies of nations. Credit comes close to being the warp and woof of the financial fabric of the world.

**Evolution of the Credit Department.**—Since credit is a power, it is clearly essential for the business enterprise to determine, before delivering goods or services on credit terms, just who actually has this power and who has not. In order to appraise the credit worth of customers, and to insure the prompt collection of amounts due from them, business has evolved the modern credit department.

In the early days of merchandising, the proprietor was his own credit manager. His customers were not numerous, and he knew most of them personally. To each applicant for credit accommodation he applied a threefold test. Can he pay? Will he pay? When will he pay? If the answers to these questions were satisfactory, the customer got the goods and the charge went "on the book."

With the increase of population and the growth of metropolitan centers came a demand for larger merchandising establishments. This was met by the department store. The credit problem had not changed essentially. The threefold test was still effective. But no one man could possibly know all of the customers, dependably rate their credit worth, and collect the amounts they owed. These tasks called for a special group of experts, and thus the credit department was born.

**Functions of the Credit Department.**—The credit department in the well-organized business enterprise of today follows three chief objectives:

1. Establishing the credit relation with customers.
2. Passing on orders for goods or services.
3. Collecting amounts due for goods or services supplied.

In a small business the credit manager is directly concerned with all of these functions. In a larger enterprise the general credit manager has responsibility for all of them but delegates to his assistants authority to handle the routine details. In the event of insolvency on the part of a debtor, or trouble of any kind in connection with an important account, the general credit manager personally assumes command and stands by until the situation is cleared.

**Establishing the Credit Relation.**—In appraising the credit worth of a customer the efficient credit manager gives special attention to the "three C's of credit,"—character, capacity, and capital. This checks fairly well with the threefold test used by the old-time merchant. If the customer has capacity to run his business at a profit he *can* pay; if he has character, he *will*

pay; and if he possesses a proper amount of working capital he will either discount his bills or meet them at maturity, thus answering the question of *when* he will pay.

For each new customer the credit department sets up a credit file. In this file is accumulated all of the information that can be obtained about the customer. Some of this, as for example the latest balance sheet and operating statement, must be secured from the customer himself. Other information is obtained from banks, mercantile agencies, attorneys, and interchange bureaus such as those maintained by the National Association of Credit Men. On the basis of all of this information, the credit decision is made. If it is favorable, the account is accepted. If unfavorable, it is rejected.

In a book which deals with the problem of collections it is scarcely possible to emphasize too strongly the relation between proper credit appraisal and effective collections. If due caution is exercised before the credit relation is actually established, the collector's task is greatly simplified. But slipshod work in credit appraisal is inevitably followed by difficult collections, and frequently by costly experiences with embarrassed debtors.

As no sale is completed until the money is collected, the sales department should have an active interest in proper credit appraisal and its bearing on collections. Salesmen may be, and in well-run business organizations are trained to be, most helpful to the credit department. They see the customer face to face. They know how he runs his business, the quality and quantity of his clientele, the condition of his stock and equipment, and the trend of population toward or away from his neighborhood. These facts are grist for the credit manager's mill, and he should make sure that the salesmen are required to report them to him.

**Passing on Orders.**—As soon as the credit relation is established, or immediately thereafter, the credit department sets up a "credit limit" for the account. With this done, the checking of orders for shipment becomes largely a matter of clerical routine. The work must, however, be done with painstaking care and constant vigilance. If, through the carelessness of the

checker, credit accommodation is given beyond the established limit, the customer is disposed to take the position that this automatically increases the limit, and both credit and sales departments are involved in a controversy which may ultimately result in the loss of the account.

**Turning Receivables into Cash.**—In this brief introductory survey of credit and collection fundamentals we come now to the crux of the whole merchandising process—the job of holding the debtor to his promise of payment. While the importance of the collection function is conceded in a general way by most business executives, it has never been given the place it deserves in the set-up of the business organization. In many enterprises the sales department has overshadowed the credit and collection department to such an extent as to deprive the organization of any semblance of perspective or balance. The sales division has been favored in personnel, equipment, and compensation, while the credit and collection department has been restricted to a small force, poorly equipped, inadequately paid, and housed in the least desirable location in the office layout.

This condition is due partly to faulty perception on the part of the high executives, who fail to realize that no matter how efficiently they produce or how cleverly they market their product the enterprise as a whole cannot possibly succeed unless sales are completed by effective collections. But it is due to an even greater extent to the failure of credit managers to sell themselves and their departments to the entire organization. Thus far, the credit manager has been virtually inarticulate. And his present position in the organization is due chiefly to that very fact.

Fortunately there are notable exceptions to this general rule. Some credit managers have insisted upon receiving, and have received, for their departments the recognition to which effective credit and collection policies and methods are clearly entitled. They have won their place in the organization largely on the basis of the proposition that the credit department is in the best possible position to observe, appraise and interpret



general business conditions and trends. The department should therefore have a voice in the executive counsels of the concern, and in a rapidly increasing number of enterprises it now has such a voice.

**The Collection Job.**—If all debtors could and would pay as they have promised, the task of converting accounts receivable into cash would be simple indeed. Unfortunately, the situation is complicated in many ways. The collector has to deal with many types of customers. Some have adequate working capital; others have barely enough to keep their enterprise alive; and still others should never have gone into business at all. The latter class might have been eliminated by more careful credit appraisal, but even the most efficient credit department gets caught occasionally with a "sick account," and all the credit manager can do is to sit up with it and hope for a speedy recovery.

Another complication arises from the fact that accounts do not always "stay put." Customers whose paying habits for years have been satisfactory suddenly begin to slip. Discounters cease to take advantage of the liberal interest rates, and use the full time allowed for payment. Those who have always paid promptly at maturity begin to ask for extensions. These developments may be due to special causes affecting individual customers, but they are most likely to appear when general business is depressed and the public's buying power restricted.

Still another obstacle in the path of the collector is the natural desire on the part of the debtor to hang onto his money as long as possible. If his working capital is inadequate, this motive is particularly strong. He may have had a hard time collecting from his own customers, and may be apprehensive concerning future collections. No matter how earnestly he may desire to protect his credit title, he feels a strong cross-pull in the direction of conserving his own cash position.

In view of all these obstacles and complications, it is evident that the collector's chief problem is to *sell* his customer on the idea of paying in accordance with the terms expressed or implied in the sales contract. And his salesmanship must com-

pete with that of other credit managers. The customer presumably owes several if not many creditors. The credit manager of the A. B. C. Company must therefore sell him on two points:

1. The desirability of parting with his money rather than keeping it.
2. The wisdom of paying it to the A. B. C. Company rather than to another creditor.

On the first point the credit manager may bear down hard on the advantages of discounting, showing the customer that the discount privilege offers a much more generous rate of interest than the banker will concede on his deposits. On the second point the manager must stress the quality of service rendered by his concern, the desirability of maintaining pleasant relations, and the personal considerations which make the protection of the credit title important to both parties to the contract.

**The Principle of Resale.**—If any single idea is entitled to be regarded as the keynote of modern collection technique, it is the principle of resale. This important principle will be treated fully in Chapters 3 and 4. In this introductory chapter it is sufficient to say that the credit manager has, in the last analysis, but two things to do: get the money and keep the customer. He accomplishes the first by means that are described in detail in the chapters that follow. And he achieves the second objective by “reselling” the customer. That is to say, he reawakens (to some extent, at least) the state of mind in which the customer found himself at the time the sale was made.

**Stages of the Collection Process.**—In normal collections, where litigation is not involved, the collection process has three chief stages:

1. Formal request for payment.
2. Follow-up, by form or personal letters, or both.
3. Acknowledgment of payment received.

As these steps in collection procedure will be discussed at some length in the ensuing chapters, they will be only briefly characterized here. The original request takes the form of an invoice or statement, and if payment is received thereon in accordance with the stipulated sales terms no follow-up is necessary, but the payment is immediately acknowledged. If no response is made to the original invoice or subsequent statements, the follow-up process is begun. Many concerns use a series of "period letters," which follow each other at intervals of ten or fifteen days. Other concerns avoid form letters entirely, treating each account in arrears as a special problem calling for personal correspondence.

**Acknowledgment of Payments.**—Practice varies widely in this matter, but the modern trend is decidedly in favor of making some sort of acknowledgment of each payment received. This procedure appears to be pleasing to customers, as it assures them that the payments forwarded have been safely received. And it gives the seller an opportunity to send the buyer a brief message of appreciation, thereby increasing the mutual goodwill which is so important in building up pleasant and lasting business relations.

**Knowing the Job.**—In concluding this introductory chapter, it may be fitting to throw in the suggestion that the credit manager, if he is to be a real executive, must make it his business to know his job inside and out, and from the bottom up. He must, for example, be something of a cost accountant, knowing just what expense is involved in each stage of the credit and collection process, and what relation increased costs would have to increased profits for the concern. With that kind of information at his command, he is in a position to take advantage of every opportunity to improve the efficiency of his department and also to give it a more influential standing in the general business organization.

## CHAPTER 2

### COORDINATION FOR EFFICIENCY

**Problems of Current Conditions.**—One of the most dependable signs of credit and collection efficiency is ability to revise the departmental policy in order to meet changing business conditions. The relation between bad debt losses and the fluctuations of the business cycle curve is fairly well established. Losses are comparatively low when general business is on the upswing. As soon as a boom period has reached its inevitable culmination and the curve turns downward, collections become more difficult, and in the trough of a depression liquidations and failures reach their highest point.

These developments place two important responsibilities at the door of the credit department. One is a firmer policy in regard to both credit appraisal and collections. The other, which is even more vital because it affects the welfare of the entire enterprise, is to place at the disposal of the high executive command all possible information which will throw light on general business conditions and probable future trends.

As has already been suggested in Chapter 1, this activity, which is essentially a research function, presents an opportunity as well as a duty. Nothing can possibly help the credit department, in its relations with the other divisions of the organization, half as much as prompt, intelligent cooperation in analyzing and interpreting changing business conditions.

**Teamwork in Marketing.**—Business today takes a broad view of collections, and does not rest content with the theory that the collection man spends half his energy running down "dead beats" and the other half in sending out statements. The modern executive, whether manufacturer, jobber, or retailer, studies the place of collections in the entire operation of his house—that is to say, in its marketing plan. Where does

the collection department fit into the complete plan of getting the goods into the hands of the customers? The entire organization of the seller, including every department and individual from the president to the shipping clerk, has a part to play in this marketing plan, in distributing goods and in securing payment for them. The marketing function is especially noticeable in the sales and advertising departments, but it is no less a function of the credit and collection department. It is necessary to study the place the latter department occupies in order to adopt policies which shall harmonize with the general purposes of the house, and to insure that this department is overlooking no constructive opportunity.

Business cannot be carried on in water-tight compartments. The collection department which says or thinks, "Let the sales department sell the goods; all we have to worry about is getting the money," is as short-sighted as the sales department which acts on the doctrine that it is not its concern how the money is collected—its task is to produce gross volumes of sales.

**Collection from the Point of View of the Buyer.**—If any man doubts the need of harmonizing the procedure of the collection department with the other operations of the house, let him look at collection from the point of view of the buyer.

It is not uncommon for a retailer to receive in the same mail an enthusiastic letter from a sales department urging him to buy, and a dunning letter from the collection department of the same house demanding that he pay for what he has bought. What will be the effect on the customer of such playing at cross purposes?

The common example of failure to cooperate is afforded by the salesman who recklessly oversells his customers, then growls at the "turn-down" his orders receive from the credit department, and sympathizes openly with the customer's complaint against the way the collection manager is pressing him for payment. This is not a pretty spectacle for the customer to behold. It breaks down in his mind the prestige of the house, makes him less willing to heed its advice about buying, and strews thorns on the path of the collection manager.

**A Unified Merchandising Plan.**—The customer should see all the departments of a house functioning together to aid him in merchandising. He should understand that the departments all have a common object, i.e., to aid him to dispose of goods at a profit for himself and for the house which sells them to him. The purpose of credit is to help him enlarge his business by selling more goods than he has cash to pay for; the purpose of sales is to get into his hands goods adapted to his needs and on which he can make a profit; and the purpose of collection is to get him to pay for goods already purchased, so that he can be allowed to purchase other goods to sell at a profit. The work of each is necessary to his success in business.

It is hard for the various departments to realize their essential unity. They occupy different offices, are composed of men of different temperaments, and sometimes build up contradictory policies. But the buyer sees them all as a unit. Each of its representatives signifies to him the house as a whole; and the lack of harmony between departments shows very plainly to him. All these conflicting methods, which take their rise in the minds of men widely separated from each other, converge and meet in the morning's mail of the retailer and display their unconscious differences side by side on his desk. The result can hardly be favorable to the common object of all departments of the house—to build the retailer into an even better outlet for its goods.

**Tests of Efficiency.**—What should be the goal of the credit man's endeavors? By what test should he measure his efficiency? Is it to be the percentage of losses from bad debts? Very well—but after he has reduced this as low as possible, then what next? And is there any other test? How about the "turnover" of customers, the number of customers who bought last year, but whose names are not on the books this year? In place of every one of them, some new account must be solicited at a selling expense greater than would be required in selling a customer who had already "bought satisfaction" from this house.

**Percentage of Loss not the True Test.**—"How low are your losses?" asked a former sales manager of his old friend, the credit man. "*Too low*," was the startling reply. "I am thinking we must have lost a good deal of valuable business keeping them down to that point." This illustrates the fact that the credit man knows he has a constructive function which cannot be measured in terms of a single test. His efficiency is bound up with the welfare of his house. Perhaps, after all, the turnover of customers is the final test of the credit department's efficiency.

**Estimating Credit Department Costs.**—The following are factors which should be taken into consideration when estimating the cost of a credit department and determining its efficiency:

- I. Direct charges:
  1. Accounts charged off as non-collectible
  2. Collector's commissions
  3. Court and legal costs
  4. Credit department:
    - (a) Salaries
    - (b) Rent
    - (c) Supplies, including printing
    - (d) Postage
    - (e) Telephone and telegraph
- II. Interest on accounts receivable
- III. Loss of turnover on capital tied up in accounts receivable
- IV. Loss of discounts in paying own bills
- V. Lost sales; lost customers due to:
  1. Harsh or overconservative credit and collection policies
  2. Loss of respect through lax credit and collection policies
  3. Unwillingness to trade where account is overdue
- VI. These are affected by:
  1. Sales department policies
  2. Credit department policies
  3. Collection department policies
  4. Claim department policies
  5. Efficient system in the credit and collection department

**Do Merchants Know Their Costs?**—An investigation was made of the accounts of the retail grocers in a middle western city, to determine the cost of the credit department, in order to ascertain the amount which should be added to the price of groceries for charge customers, under the "cash and carry" plan.

The evidence showed clearly that few grocers out of the total number knew where they stood, or what their credit expense was.

The information received was tabulated under the following heads:

- Average amount accounts receivable
- Average credit period
- Average number of accounts receivable
- Average monthly amount of charge sales
- Average bad debt loss
- Collection expense
- Bookkeepers' wages and expense
- Total credit department expense
- Per cent cost of credit department

The answers given under the heads of "Average amount of accounts receivable" and "Average amount of charge sales," often indicated that either the one or the other was incorrect, or that the figure given as the average credit period could not be correct. In other words, the merchant's own figures often showed that his customers paid their bills much less frequently than he supposed they did, or that his average outstanding accounts receivable were greater than he supposed.

Since a merchant's entire system of buying and paying for his own purchases is dependent on the time when he gets in his own money, this means that he is basing his business on an estimate which the figures from his own books show to be false.

The percentage of total sales required to maintain the credit department was given by different merchants all the way from .01 to 8.2 per cent. The merchants did not know how often their customers paid them; they did not know how much their credit business was costing them.



**Problems of Increased Volume.**—Every endeavor to increase volume of sales throws a fresh burden on the collection department. If the increase is sought through an enlargement of the orders from each individual customer, then not only must the sales department stir itself to help the customers dispose of this unwonted quantity of merchandise, but the collection department must keep wide awake to make sure that the buyer does not make the larger invoices an excuse for poor paying. If a sales campaign is carried on in an unfamiliar territory, somebody in the house must study the methods of payment in that territory, must devise methods of collection accordingly, and must get in contact with the outside agency that does the best work in that locality. Perhaps volume is to be sought by selling direct to the retailer or to ultimate consumers, requiring collection methods that are brand new from top to bottom. It may be that a new class of trade is to be solicited whose orders will be smaller and perhaps more frequent. Then the house will demand a system to take care of them without undue expense. Perhaps a new line of goods is taken on, of value so attractive that it is certain to bring in quantities of new orders, but allowing so small a margin that unusually prompt collections and even specially close terms must go with them. Thereupon the collection department must get up a special procedure to apply to the new situation.

Or, suppose a house has been competing for the orders of a well-established trade in a certain line and decides to enlarge its business by selling to the comparatively poor credit risks, that is, to a section of the trade which its competitors are deliberately avoiding. The highest intelligence in matters of credit and the greatest promptness of payment cannot be expected from this class of trade, and the collection department must prepare its weapons accordingly. The story has been told of a manufacturer who established himself on the market by instructing his salesmen to call only on dealers who had no credit rating. It is fair to suppose that the collection department of this manufacturer had no cobwebs in it.

A line of "luxury" goods may be taken on by a wholesaler who has been accustomed to deal in "utility" goods and who

expects to bring in a new group of customers while he retains his old ones. But he may find it harder to get his money for the new line because the consumers who buy them are often in the slow-pay class. Any of these conditions may induce him to add an efficiency man to the staff of his credit department. Such an expert can use his skill in constructive credits in dealing with merchants who find it hard to make payments under the new conditions and are glad to receive suggestions in methods of financing and selling.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE PRINCIPLE OF RESALE

**Collection Is Resale.**—For the man who wants collections that *get the money*, there is one great principle that opens the way to success. It is, "Collection is resale."

This is a more suggestive statement of the well-known principle, "Get the money but *keep the customer*." How is the collector to keep the customer? By "reselling" him; that is, by reawakening, to some extent at least, the state of mind under which the sale was made.

**Sale and Resale.**—When a sale is made, the salesman has succeeded in awakening in the customer's mind a desire for the article, whether goods or service, that is being sold. He has likewise convinced the customer of the value of the article and has induced him to take the action of ordering the goods. If the sale is made on credit, the buyer knows well that the time will come when he must pay for his purchase. But his desire for the goods is great enough to overcome the anticipated unpleasantness of parting with his money. Probably he is never so thoroughly "sold" as during the first few minutes after he has closed the deal, when he has all the joys of imagination. By the time the goods arrive, he may be in a mood to ship them back, and after they have been on his shelf or in use for some time, or even after he has sold them and received payment for them, he may be considerably less enthusiastic than he was at the moment of ordering.

When he ordered, moreover, he understood thoroughly—or should have been made to understand—the credit obligation, and he appreciated or should have appreciated the unpleasant consequences that would follow his failure to make payment. But this impression also may fade from his mind as time goes on.

One thing is certain—at the time of sale the customer's state of mind was a pleasant one. He wanted the goods; he applauded and approved of the credit arrangement that enabled him to get them; he was willing to pay. Certainly he did not originally buy the goods and assume credit responsibilities because he was *afraid* of what would happen if he did not, but because he was thoroughly *pleased* with the prospects. Accordingly, if this imaginary customer pays promptly on the due date, it is probably because he remembers his satisfaction with the goods, and because furthermore, he knows it is to his own advantage to live up to his credit obligations. Likewise, if he does not pay promptly, it is probably because these impressions have faded from his mind. The goods were sold, but they did not “stay sold,” and the buyer must be “resold.”

**Reawakening a State of Mind.**—The first state of mind cannot be fully reawakened; we can hardly hope to get a man to pay his bills with as much enjoyment as he originally felt when buying the goods. To overbalance his natural reluctance to part with his money, the collector must throw into the scale such factors as the power of *habit*—it is habitual for a man to pay his bills whether he likes it or not; the moral *dislike of wrongdoing*—a man who does not pay his bills is condemned by his own conscience; and the *fear of force*—a man who does not pay his bills is subject to law, which will compel him to give up the money.

But the power of habit is likely to be upset by cross-currents of opposing desires when the customer wants the money for his own use. And while the dislike of wrongdoing and the fear of force hover always in the background of his mind, he may resist payment a long time before they operate strongly. Long terms and easy-going methods have been customary in America, so that the slow-pay man is apt to consider himself no worse than his neighbor, and to turn a deaf ear to the credit department's remonstrances until it takes strong measures.

**The Value of Resale.**—Resale is the principle which reduces the creditor's bills receivable, gives him more capital to carry

on an efficient business, increases his profits by decreasing his expenses, cuts down the credit period, turns delinquents into discounters, and establishes a clientele of financially sound customers. Resale builds a hearty goodwill, establishes for the seller an identity of interest with his customers, and develops them into increasingly valuable outlets for his merchandise. Resale makes for cooperation, which is the vital principle of contemporary business.

Resale throws open to the collector all the storehouse of appeal and suggestion that has added such strength to modern merchandising when employed by the sales and advertising departments. It enlarges his study of the debtor's psychology, and increases his ability to get results in dealing with him. It invites him to employ more varied and accurately chosen weapons in his assault upon delinquency, and promises him as reward an easier victory.

**The Coming Principle.**—Although the principle of resale has not hitherto been fully recognized or stated, it has been applied by forward-looking merchandisers to the work of credit and collection, until it will soon revolutionize that portion of business procedure.

Any house which should fail to employ modern methods of salesmanship and sales organization in the solution of its merchandising problems would be marked for a position of decreasing strength, if not for actual decay. Likewise the house which fails to understand and use the principle of resale, is foregoing a measureless advantage. The house which wishes an advantage over its competitors will seize and employ the new principle, and will deserve the success it earns.

**Are Collections a Disease?**—It must not be forgotten that collections are a part of marketing. Sometimes men make the mistake of thinking that the work of collections is made necessary by a disease of business, that the collection department is a sort of pest-house, which a healthy society would no longer require. They seem to believe that the collector deals exclusively with immorality, that he should show it severity, and no

mercy; that he is a combination of lawyer, preacher, and executioner.

**A Constructive Undertaking.**—No thinking man holds this view consciously, but some trace of it is seen in the talk about "getting onto a cash basis," and "eliminating the evil and expense of collections." The truth is that the credit system is the distinguishing mark of our present era of civilization, and that to go to a cash basis would set back the clock by centuries. The work of collections is not to eliminate a vice, but perpetually to aid in the great constructive enterprise of distributing goods. Infinite resource and planning must be devoted both to getting goods into the hands of consumers, and to securing payment for those goods. The changing customs of business, the constant shifting of markets and populations and buying habits, the elasticity of human nature itself, will forever tax the wisdom and invention of merchandisers, both to sell their goods under new conditions, and to collect their money under the same new conditions. Business houses, like men, grow old and die; and the sign of their old age is their inability to adapt themselves to changed conditions. Adaptation is written into the law of growth. The constructive work of collecting the money will never be over, so long as there are goods to sell and money to be paid for them.

When man has become omniscient and perceives exactly where his duty and permanent advantage lie; when accidents no longer force men into the whirlpool of ruin where their sense of righteousness is lost and they grasp at every straw; when poverty and disease are gone, and war and selfishness have vanished, and all men think alike; when every buyer is born with a perfect knowledge of business and no longer needs education by those wiser than he—then the collection department may lay aside its eternal warfare on ignorance, carelessness, and opposing views of self-interest, and enjoy a well-earned repose. But for the next few years, at all events, the collection manager is not likely to work himself out of a job.

**Driving Back the Frontier.**—It is probably true that the great task of merchandising in America is and has been to

drive back the frontier, to raise the standard of living and the scale of civilization. It is just as true that the work of collecting money when it is due, of establishing sounder terms and a greater sense of responsibility, had its share in wresting us from the frontier conditions of finance, and in increasing our national prosperity and our ability to gratify our wants.

**One Unit in an Organism.**—As has been said already, the collector's work is intimately related to all the other departments of the house, has its effect on them, and is affected by them. If sales are forced and improper promises are given, collection is difficult. If a new and daring plan of sale is adopted, side by side with it must be planned a collection method equal to the situation. If collection is not intelligently conducted, the next sales will be harder to make. If the claim department makes its adjustments bunglingly, collections are held up and rendered ineffective. If the goods are not what they should be, if the production department has failed, the collections will be slow or impossible.

**Familiar Illustrations of Resale.**—One application of the principle of resale in collections is found in the method of collecting petty accounts as practiced by some houses who remind the customer, "We know you were satisfied with these goods," as a reason why he should pay for them. Other managers object to this on principle, pointing out that it is bad practice to carry over sales arguments into the credit period. Where the sale has been made, they say, and the customer has accepted the goods, it is bad practice to reopen the question. Every collection letter should state or imply directly that payment must be made; that there is no room for argument.

There can be no doubt that this principle is sound, but still it is possible to use resale as *one element* in collections. Provided it is assumed unhesitatingly that the goods were entirely satisfactory, to refer in early collection letters to the good quality of the merchandise, makes the debtor feel rather ashamed of himself for not paying promptly for value received. The strength of the creditor's position is not weakened any

more than by the use of other courteous means of requesting payment. Resale of the goods under these conditions is not a weak defense, but an attack on the debtor's resistance.

**"The Money Is Due and Must Be Paid."**—The credit manager of one of the largest corporations in the United States who had formerly been credit manager of one of the companies now controlled by the corporation said in reference to this method, "We never use any argument in collecting other than the one that the money is due and must be paid." In further conversation, however, he went on to show how every letter was written as a result of a close study and knowledge of the individual customer's likes and dislikes, of his business location and opportunity. He told also how his letters frequently included personal remarks on the customer's business or private affairs. "We like to show our customers that we know them as friends, and that we are as much interested in them when collecting money as when selling the goods." In other words, the resale attitude dominated the collection methods of this corporation. Although their methods were based on the fact of the customer's obligations, and never lost sight of the principle, "the money is due and must be paid," yet the human element—the resale point of view—was kept foremost.

**Resale in Instalment Collections.**—The importance of the principle of resale in instalment collections is hard to overestimate. "Our whole problem," says a manager of a company whose name is widely known, "lies in painting the picture so strongly that it will remain in the mind of the buyer and get him to continue. Needless to say this cannot all be done at one time, but must be carried on through the period of instalment payment. The purchaser must be sold and resold. Delinquency is a state of mind. The typical delinquent gets into that state because he has not imagination enough to see the consequences of his delinquency. Personally, I believe that this statement applies to business of every kind, whether the consequences of the buyer's lack of imagination are loss of credit, loss of business, loss of self-advantage, or something



else. In every case, in order to sell the goods and secure payment, the customer must be sold and resold."

**Are You Reselling Goods or Credit?**—While this question is discussed more fully later on, it is proper to point out here that resale may be applied to credit as well as to goods. It is lack of imagination, according to the manager just quoted, that prevents some of his customers from keeping on with their instalment payments. To get them to continue he must get them to realize the advantages of the goods he is selling. Is it not equally true that lack of imagination and, still more, lack of information pertaining to the nature and value of the credit privilege, are the cause of most delinquency? The credit manager must sell and resell credit.

## CHAPTER 4

### USING THE PRINCIPLE OF RESALE

**When to Use Resale.**—At what stage in the collection procedure can resale be most effectively used? While it is effective at every stage, right up to the time when the account is turned over to the attorney with instructions to begin suit, nevertheless the early stages of delinquency afford the best field for its use. At this stage the purchaser's realization of the benefits received from his purchase are keenest, and appeals based on that realization will have most effect. Second, he has not yet fully realized that his account is overdue and that he is delinquent. Payment is still the natural action for him to take.

**The Critical Moment.**—There is in the history of every overdue account a critical stage when its future course hangs on very slight circumstances. A little thing may secure payment or may postpone it. The delinquent intends to pay, and has not yet fully realized that the account is overdue. If the creditor could know precisely when this stage occurred and could take just the right action, he could prevent an enormous amount of delinquency. In the case of most accounts and especially with customers who are not habitually and deliberately slow-pay, this stage is reached just after payment is due.

*The first sign of slowness in payment is the best time for resale.*

**A Series of Resale Letters.**—The Alexander Hamilton Institute makes notable use of the resale principle in correspondence with purchasers of its course and service. In this instance the collection problem is, naturally enough, most difficult in the case of those who have slowed up or entirely discontinued their study of the course. The letters are therefore designed to resell the student on the desirability of completing the course

and the possibility of its aiding materially in his advancement in business.

In a series of nine letters used for this purpose, several are accompanied by collateral material intended to rekindle the enthusiasm which prompted the student's original determination to sign up for the course. One begins with this paragraph:

Like human beings, business enterprises grow old. A flow of new blood and new ideas is necessary. One of the ironies of the present era is that some organizations in their admirable solicitude for executives of long service during the depression now find themselves heavily penalized for not having trained men for replacements or otherwise obtained new personnel.

Another letter illustrates the desirability of attempting to get the recipient to take definite action immediately upon receipt of the communication. The concluding paragraphs are as follows:

I'll appreciate it a great deal if you will just sit down now and drop me a few lines, telling me exactly how you are using your Course and Service and what you are getting out of it.

Perhaps you can suggest some way in which we can serve you to better advantage. If so, your suggestion will certainly be welcome. Won't you let me hear from you now, before this letter slips your mind?

Another letter in the series makes, in its final paragraph, this appeal for a quick response from the student:

Won't you give me your cooperation at this time by jotting down your answers to the questions on the enclosed business reply card and dropping it in the mail-box today? We'll pay the postage.

The opening paragraphs of all of the letters are so framed that they attract the reader's interest and insure his continuing to read until the main message of the communication has been delivered. The following will serve as examples:

In these days when competition is so keen, opportunities must be pried open by the proper application of management principles, based on experience. There is more than an ordinary need for the average man to set his task—then to concentrate upon it even though it be something that he expects will take him a long time to accomplish; the realization of a personal advancement program, for example. What we all need, to some extent, is the kind of organizing ability to fix objectives and then to reach out for them.

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"Leisure is either to make us a greater nation or to be our downfall," said Dr. George Barton Cutten. He had in mind the leisure earned by labor. Commenting upon this point, the *New York Sun* said editorially: "How best to use leisure has been a problem for somebody ever since Adam awoke in Eden."

That leisure—or a share of it—is something for which the Alexander Hamilton Institute is competing. In our acquaintance we know men who devote hours of their leisure to the practice they feel necessary to perfect their golf game. The same thing is true of any game, any sport, any hobby that gains their attention and interest.

With the reader's interest enlisted, the letters then proceed to definite resale arguments, as in the following paragraphs:

Perhaps it would be well to remind you of the importance of maintaining a regular, systematic reading schedule in order to gain the best results from your work. My suggestion is that you set aside two or three evenings each week, or a half-hour a day, as time belonging to you and the Institute.

I want you to know that the large educational staff which is associated with me in this department is anxious to cooperate with you closely, in every possible way, to help you to secure the maximum value from your enrolment. I shall be glad to have you write to me personally whenever you feel that I can aid you to secure better results from your reading.

Comments from satisfied customers make admirable resale arguments. One of the Institute letters quotes such statements as the following:

"This will be my third text when completed this week. The first book, 'Business and the Man,'—to put it mildly—yanked me clean out of a depression that was far worse than any money depression that we have experienced. In spite of a College education, I had lost the correct slant on life and business—100%. I have used more initiative, judgment, will-power, and all the rest of them, in the past few months than I thought I possessed, and am still improving. I believe that I no longer resemble the 'leaning-tower,' and my health is up 200%."

"I consider that the best investment I ever made is one which enrolled me with the Institute. It has taken me out of a position calling for absolute drudgery at a cost accountant's desk and advanced me to that of general manager of a new corporation at a very gratifying increase in my income, together with far more congenial employment. I feel that without the instructions and support which I have already received and which I expect to continue to receive from the Institute, I should hardly have cared to assume the new responsibility."

While this series of letters is designed to help collections on the sale of a service rather than of merchandise, many of the

principles followed therein are applicable to resale letters in any line of business.

**Resale in Marketing Motorcycles.**—Although the Harley-Davidson Motorcycle Company secures payment in full from its dealers before the machines leave the company's hands, yet the dealer himself receives but  $33\frac{1}{3}$  per cent of the purchase price down from the "rider," as the customer is called, and the balance in instalments. The company protects its dealers by reselling every rider for the period of a year, sending him news items, pictures, etc., about Harley-Davidsons that are giving service all over the world. This follow-up prevents unreasonable complaints by maintaining goodwill, and incidentally is the means of selling other products handled by the company, but it also has a marked effect in keeping the instalments regular and prompt.

**Collect While the Mental Image Is Fresh.**—After goods have been used or possessed for some time, the mental image of benefits received from them has faded, or is overlaid by fresh anticipations of benefits from other purchases. The cigars I have smoked are not so pleasant as those I am going to smoke. The goods unpacked and lying on my shelves are less attractive to me than when I first unpacked them and thought of how much they were going to bring.

Are you selling labor? Then the time to collect is while the purchaser has a lively mental image of the carpenters with their saws and hammers, or of the plasterers whom he waited for and who kept his house in a turmoil, or of the painters and their ladders and brushes and the bridge of boards across the front porch. These things impress the purchaser with the amount of time spent on the job, and he knows the time is worth money.

Later, when the floor is covered with rugs and the walls with pictures, and the house has become a place to live in, the purchaser of the labor has lost in part the mental image of the things he bought, but he never loses the mental image of the pleasure of keeping his money as long as he can.

Still later, too, the plaster may crack a little and the paint may peel or blister. When time has given a chance for some dissatisfaction to arise in the purchaser's mind, he feels "justified" in withholding payment.

Many up-to-date sellers of labor and service obtain from the purchaser a signed statement that the job was completed satisfactorily. This varies from a simple slip to be signed, like a receipt for the delivery of coal, to a form showing the number of hours spent each day and the rate per hour. A manufacturer of engines, for example, uses the latter kind of receipt for installation and repairs. Two years ago, he changed the wording of the paragraph just above the customer's signature, taking out all technical language and making it the simplest possible statement that the engine was in good running order and that the customer authorized the company to bill him both for time expended and for materials expended as shown in the statement.

Since changing his wording he has not had one disputed charge and his collections have been far easier. In every case, he resells the service rendered, and also expresses the company's willingness to give further service. He secures payment, moreover, as soon as possible after the job is completed.

**Does Resale Abandon the Creditor's Rights?**—But does the adoption of the principle of resale imply giving up the principle that the money is the creditor's by right, and that he has the right to use force to secure it? Surely the fundamental fact is that the money is his, and not the debtor's, and that if payment is not made, legal redress will be sought. This is true, one may argue, whatever face may be put on it, and whatever fine words are used about it.

**Forcible Methods Are Expensive.**—Yes, it is true, the good credit manager will reply, the argument is fundamental. But it is also true that going to law is not always the best way to get one's rights. If force is the only argument, the delinquent will delay payment until force is about to be used, with the result of a long credit period, and a large outstanding in-

debtedness, both of which are expensive. If force is the only argument, the customer will not be so likely to buy again, with a resulting large turnover of customers, and the heavy cost involved in soliciting and selling a large percentage of new trade each year. If force is the only argument, the volume of sale to each customer will be less, because the credit manager will be thinking of caution and safety rather than of selling the goods.

Force is the last, but not the only argument. It is like the appeal to arms, "*ultima ratio regum*," the final argument of kings, the last resort when diplomacy fails. If a credit manager can be found who in actual practice restricts his arguments to force and the threat of force, and if a majority of his customers, notwithstanding this, are paying without waiting to be forced, then other arguments are present *in their minds* which urge them to pay. If the credit manager can discover what those arguments are, surely he will do well to employ them openly or by suggestion with his slow-pay or delinquent customers, so that at least he gives his customers active co-operation instead of making them do all the work of arguing themselves into payment.

**Why Do Customers Pay?**—Every credit manager knows the reasons that induce customers to pay, and to greater or less extent avails himself of their aid in making collections. First come those reasons which rise instinctively before the customer's mind, without requiring much thought.

1. He pays because he has the habit of paying, because he is used to making checks out at certain times, because he has a system—and the credit manager of the creditor house has a system—of bringing the subject to his attention.
2. He pays because he has pride in meeting his obligations and conducting an efficient business.
3. He pays because he has goodwill for the house; he thinks, "I like to do business with these people, because they treat me right, and so I'll treat them right."

4. He pays because he knows he ought to pay, because it is a moral obligation.
5. He pays because he wants to avoid annoyance, and he knows he will be "pestered" with letters or collectors if he is slow.

**Keeping a Good Reputation.**—If he thinks a little further, he pays to keep a good reputation and to protect his credit rating. He knows that the privilege of doing a credit business is a matter of life and death to him, because he is accustomed to pay for his invoices in large part with the money received from the sale of the goods, and the 30 or 60 days' terms enable him to provide the cash with which to settle his bills. If he were driven to a cash basis, it would not be possible for him to buy enough goods to satisfy his customers; he would have to shrink his volume of sales, sacrifice his prestige and goodwill, and reduce himself to a fourth-rate position. To suffer this from all his creditors would be to receive a death-blow. To suffer it from one of them would mean some proportion of disaster. Even to have a shipment temporarily held up because the credit man refused to check further orders for shipment until his indebtedness was reduced, would probably destroy the profit on those goods by keeping them out of his hands until the best market time was past. If he has a good reputation, moreover, he can increase the size of his orders without too much question from the credit man, and this may mean doing a big business at a strategic moment.

**Getting the Right Goods.**—Besides securing the advantages of credit-buying, a good reputation allows him to deal in the goods he prefers to handle. No matter how "independent" he is, he has his preferences about goods, and so have his customers. If he gets into trouble with a good house, and tries to switch his orders to another equally good, he is likely to suffer an embarrassing investigation, thanks to the cooperation that exists among good houses. Perhaps he will be driven to take up a line of merchandise from a house that is less scrupulous about credit—and also less scrupulous about the quality of its line.



**Credit, Goods, and Service.**—In general, also, he wants to stand well with a house so as to get service, not only from its credit department but also from its sales and other departments. He knows that whatever favors it has to bestow will be granted most willingly to its “good customers”; and the same desire holds good as to his relations with other houses.

Prompt payment and a good reputation, then, enable him to secure credit, goods, and service from the house which is his creditor at the moment, and from other houses.

**Paying to Secure the Discount.**—The wide-awake, up-to-date merchant, who can get the necessary capital, pays because he wants the discount. The very substantial bonus given for prompt payment is an obvious prize dangled before his eyes, and he wants to grasp it. He could use that extra 2 to 6 per cent very handily, and if it amounts to an extra 10 to 12 per cent in the course of a year, it may mean all the difference between making a profit, with interest on his investment and payment for his services, or working without salary and breaking even. The extra profit through taking discounts may save him from steadily digging into his capital, a process which brings nearer the day when the sheet of white paper is fastened to his door—the crêpe that proclaims the death of a business.

**The Value of the Turnover.**—The merchant who is a thorough student of business pays because he wants the turnover. He buys no more than he can sell, and he watches his perpetual inventory. He hustles his capital to market for a load of goods, and brings it back, stepping on the accelerator all the way. He works hard to unload the goods and free the capital and send it back for another load as quickly as he can. He knows that if his capital makes only one trip a year, or two in three years, perhaps he will not keep abreast of rising costs; while if it travels four or five times a year and brings home a profit every time, those four or five profits in place of one or two will enable him to buy the best goods, sell at a price his customers will like, and still retain a larger profit for himself, as the reward of his superior efficiency. All this program

of a rapid turnover is blocked if his payments are slow, because there is a limit to the credit manager's willingness to ship subsequent invoices while earlier ones are still outstanding on the books.

In the last resort, the customer pays because he must. But that is a long time off.

**The Reasons for Payment—Summary.**—To summarize, the arguments with which the customer induces himself to pay are :

1. Habit, reinforced by pride, goodwill, the sense of fair play, and a feeling of moral obligation.
2. The desire to avoid trouble.
3. The desire for a good reputation, which indirectly means a credit business, the privilege of handling the right line of goods, and service from all the departments of this house and of other houses.
4. The desire for the discount, which spells additional profit, and which may be his only salvation in the face of rising costs.
5. The desire for an increased turnover, as a means of doing a prosperous and growing and really successful business.

It is the opportunity of the credit manager to set these arguments to work on behalf of his house. Some of them mean payment "some time"—"in the long run." Some of them mean payment quickly. He can keep these arguments vividly before the customer's mind; he can "sell" the advantages of credit and prompt payment, and when collecting he can "resell" them by a suggestive phrase or occasionally by careful explanation and urging.

The appeal to force, it is true, always stands behind and supports these other arguments, but it is not close to the customer's mind, and it produces its effects slowly. Other arguments and appeals can be used long before the appeal to force would take effect.

**Enlarging Trade Outlets.**—The desire not only to "keep the customer," but to develop him into an ever enlarging sales

outlet for the company, is the motive from which spring all resale policies. As the logical result of this point of view, some houses have established well-developed service or efficiency bureaus cooperating with both credit and sales departments and employing field experts who can go into a customer's house, show him just how to increase his sales, reduce his expense, finance his expense properly, and get on a paying basis—paying the customer a profit for his business and paying the creditor promptly for his invoices.

**Are Resale Policies a Needless Expense?**—Does a painstaking care for the interest of the customer shown in all the operations of the credit and collection department really pay dividends? Isn't it simpler and less expensive to send out a couple of statements, a good sharp letter followed by a draft, and then to turn the whole thing over to a collection expert outside of the house, and wash one's hands of it? This routine can be handled by the bookkeeper at small cost, while the credit manager can give all his attention to keeping undesirable citizens from getting any of the goods of the house.

**The Cheapest Method.**—The experience of the best modern houses is that this "simple" policy is the most expensive one. Satisfactory relations with the customer pay big dividends, and the more intelligent the human interest displayed in credit and collection, the more satisfactory will be the relations with the customer.

No one who has been privileged to look into the private records of some of our foremost mercantile houses can fail in his admiration for the wise constructive attitude there displayed. And no one can talk with dealers who have benefited by this genuine friendliness, and who in return have given their orders year after year to the house from which they received not only merchandise and credit but service as well, without coming to believe that a constructive attitude and resale policies in the credit and collection departments are responsible for no small measure of the success enjoyed by these houses.

## CHAPTER 5

### SELLING AND RESELLING CREDIT

**Helping Toward Quick Turnover.**—If assuring the merchant that he has bought desirable goods is a useful aid to prompt collections, giving him specific and practical suggestions as to how he may sell them is even more effective. It may be argued that this “business service” is properly a function of the sales department. So it is, to a certain extent, but not exclusively. The salesman’s contact with the customer is occasional; that of the credit and collection department is close and constant. The credit manager is in a position to give the customer specific sales suggestions at the exact time when they will be most productive—the time when the payment is due. And if he is not both able and willing to offer such suggestions he falls short of being a 100 per cent credit manager.

Merely general suggestions that the merchant “push the sales” of the merchandise he has bought for resale are not sufficient. The credit manager must be able to present definite and workable ideas, which, if followed out, will bring cash quickly into the merchant’s till, enabling him to meet his obligations to the supplier. The letter on the opposite page, from a wholesale distributor of toilet articles and preparations to a retailer who is in arrears, illustrates this particular type of communication.

**“Credit Is More Than Half of Collections.”**—The strength of the credit man in collections is due to three reasons: (1) he can avoid selling to the class of customers most likely to prove delinquent; (2) he has many opportunities to educate customers in better habits of payment; and (3) his prestige is so great that customers are desirous to retain his goodwill. He deals in a commodity, credit, which all are eager to get and which all fear to have withdrawn from them.

Dear Sir:

We were glad, for two reasons, to fill your order of January 15 for a shipment of White's face powder. First, it was a fairly large order, as orders go. What is even more important, we felt that you had sensed an opportunity to make a quick turnover and a very satisfactory profit.

As we did not receive payment on the invoice at maturity we are compelled to infer that the goods did not move as you anticipated, and we want to offer some definite suggestions that will help you to market them and thus place you in a position to take care of the invoice very soon.

First, the face powder is of A-1 quality and you may recommend it unreservedly. Even your most exacting customers will like it and come back for more.

Second, the price is very reasonable. Your competitors will have an extremely hard time matching it. Every woman uses face powder, and you can price White's for resale at a figure that will enable even schoolgirls and shopgirls of limited means to buy it.

Third, the container is most attractive, and that leads to our chief suggestion—that you immediately arrange a fair-sized window display, with a generous supply of the packages in plain view, and well-printed cards emphasizing the two points of high quality and low price. If you can arrange at the same time for a little special advertising in your local newspapers, so much the better, but we believe that the window display alone will be very likely to accomplish the purpose.

Don't forget that the American woman spends \$750,000,000 a year to make herself beautiful, and that she does it right along—in depressions as well as in years of prosperity. We want you to get your full share of this expenditure.

We are with you. Are you with us?

Very truly yours,

The methods by which a credit man judges the reliability of customers belong properly to a discussion of credits, and are touched on only incidentally in this book.

This and the chapters immediately following discuss at length the second element of the credit man's strength, his opportunities to educate his customers in better habits of payment before serious delinquency arises. In the language of the trade, he can "sell credit." They also illustrate the methods by which he uses his prestige in collections, i.e., how he "resells" credit.

**The Diplomacy of Business.**—The credit manager is really in the best position to sell credit when his house is the largest single creditor of his customer. On this house the customer is genuinely dependent; if it does not let him have the goods, because his indebtedness to it is already too large, he is face to face with ruin.

The credit manager in such a position carries a heavy burden. His operations may run into millions of dollars a year; merchandise in large quantities has been shipped on his judgment, based on evidence which to the uninitiated would seem exceedingly hazardous. His problem is enormously greater than that of finding some appeal which will bring a reply; when he has secured his reply, his problem may be only begun. His patience must be inexhaustible, because he knows better than the customer the serious consequences that would follow an actual rupture of their confidence. In his hands lie not only great sums of money but the well-being of many business men dependent on him for credit, on whom in turn rests to no small degree the prosperity of whole communities.

But the first rule of the modern credit manager is: "Ship your goods"—do not be overconservative, or you will lose money for your house. Then his problem is to safeguard the credit risks he has undertaken. He must be inexhaustible in resources for meeting the countless difficult situations that arise, and for strengthening his hold on the customer.

The confidential correspondence of credit men in this position forms a record of the inner diplomacy of business. It shows them mindful on the one hand of their obligation to maintain their terms as strictly as may be, but on the other hand ready to grant extensions of time and arrange for part payment rather than "break" the merchants who are practically dependent on them. In so doing, however, they must continually keep alive in a customer his sense of obligation and appreciation for the treatment accorded him, lest he become careless and abuse his privileges, with the result of destroying the whole delicate fabric of confidence which makes such accommodations possible. Only the man of real ability and character is worthy of receiving these privileges.

**Can Credit Be Sold?**—Sometimes the credit man in discouragement declares that credit is the cheapest article on the market; that it can be had from any one for nothing. But the history of the great merchandising houses of America answers decisively that credit can be sold and that men are found who are willing to pay the price.

**The Price of Credit.**—The price of credit is a reputation for paying one's bills. "Any one can have goods of me," announces the merchant, "provided he has the price." And any one can have credit, provided he has the price, in the form of a good record, present ability to pay, and willingness born of his understanding of the value and obligations of the credit privilege.

The difficulty in the sale of credit lies in being sure the customer is really "sold" credit. His desire to trade with a house may be caused only because he wants the goods, and he may never care whether or not he obtains credit again. He has been sold the goods; his desire for them was aroused. But did he want them enough to pay cash for them? If so he wanted to buy only the goods; if not, he wanted also to buy credit.

**"Arouse Interest."**—The credit man in making this sale of credit must follow the lines of good salesmanship. Why should an applicant be willing to pay a price for credit if he has never become interested in it? This mightiest force in the business world, this structure built on a wonderful fabric of confidence and mutual understanding, this system that holds the civilized world securely up, but that would be shattered like a house of cards if confidence were destroyed, is unknown in its value to many of the men who blindly entrust their fortunes to its operations. The banker knows its nature; the wise credit man has come into contact with it and has had his imagination quickened by the experience; but many another man is unmindful of the delicate adjustment of the forces that dominate the mercantile world, and is correspondingly lax in his sense of obligation to the structure of which he is a unit.

By virtue of his superior insight, the credit man can arouse the interest of his customers in the operations of credit, the

necessity of confidence, the necessity of paying bills promptly, and above all, the value of the credit privilege to the customer.

**"Create Desire."**—But when interest is aroused the credit man must take the next step in perfecting the sale. He must "create desire"—desire to be numbered among those worthy of receiving credit. Gratification of this desire is in part a gratification of pride in having a good financial standing, but it is chiefly a gratification of self-interest through the ability to profit by the value and conveniences of credit.

**"Secure Action."**—The credit man, unlike the salesman, does not secure his action in the form of a signature on a dotted line, nor does he receive money over the counter and watch the customer take away the goods. His sale is made when the customer has been made willing to accept the obligations as well as the privileges of credit; when he is willing to limit his purchases to what he can reasonably expect to take care of, when he is willing to conduct his business so as to dispose of goods rapidly, collect for them energetically, and pay for them promptly, instead of allowing them to pile up on his shelves and then asking extension of time from his creditors. This is a sale that may be made progressively over a period of years. After all, it is not so different from the operations of the salesman, who has recently been defined as the man "who can get a dealer to order goods without asking him to buy."

**The Best Time to Sell.**—When an applicant first comes before the credit manager he expects an investigation of his standing, and this accordingly is the best time to sell credit by arousing the customer's interest in the subject through conversation. Some men are wonderfully skilful in conducting the talk along the lines of their past experience, telling anecdotes about customers both in the past and present, examples of both good and bad habits, in a way that makes a customer feel on an equality with the speaker, and plants the seed of an appreciation of credit that will bear fruit in time to come.

When applicants for credit do not come personally before the manager but are approached by the salesman or through



the mails, the manager's opportunity for conveying education on the subject of credit is in his letters granting or refusing credit accommodation, holding up the order pending investigation, asking part cash or draft with the bill of lading on the first order, or discussing the several points that arise in connection with the information desired. If the information has come direct from the customer in the form of a property statement or a personal letter, his advice can be characterized by greater frankness and fulness.

**Selling Credit to Established Customers.**—After relations have once begun, the credit manager has many general opportunities to send printed matter, booklets, articles, etc., on credit. But numberless special occasions arise which present advantages for the discussion of points connected with credit. These are set forth later in the present chapter.

**Welcoming a Good Customer.**—An applicant for credit whose rating is high in the books of the commercial agencies, and concerning whose standing a salesman has a satisfactory report at the time of the order, would have his first order shipped without further investigation. Great numbers of orders can usually be passed on by the credit manager with very little delay. Perhaps the order is relatively small and can be shipped merely on the basis of the agency rating; or it may be the practice of the house to pass all orders up to a certain amount on the salesman's recommendation, which is possible only where the salesman has been specially trained or has been brought fully into touch with credit policies. The credit manager may have received from the salesman or from the customer the names of other large creditors, and may be satisfied to ship on this basis; or he may acknowledge the order and proceed to fill it, securing the necessary information from the other houses before shipping. In any case it is advisable to be perfectly frank in allowing the customer to know that the operation of allowing him credit has not been slighted.

The following is a letter that may be sent on receipt of the first order. It asks for information on the basis of which credit relations may be established:

Dear Sir:

Your order of May 14 has been received, and has been entered for shipment on our usual ten-day schedule.

This is, we believe, our first dealing with you and we take pleasure in welcoming you and in showing you our appreciation of your business. The information afforded by the agencies entirely warrants our shipment of this first order, but we do not doubt that you would prefer to come to a more personal understanding with us on the basis of which credit accommodation may be extended in the amount which you may require. Accordingly, we are enclosing the usual property statement, but we should be glad if you would write us in addition a personal letter stating what your business opportunities and expectations are, so that we may find ourselves in a position to be of service to you.

We shall do everything possible on our side to increase personal acquaintance and confidence that may result in mutual advantage.

Yours truly,

**Short Letters on This Subject.**—There are many occasions when such a letter as the foregoing would be advantageous, just as there are many in which a shorter letter would be preferable.

Where the investigation will delay the shipment of the order the customer should be so informed.

CREDIT AND COLLECTION DEPARTMENT

Dear Sir:

Thank you for your order of May 14 which has just reached this department.

It will be delayed a few days pending our usual routine which we hope will not greatly inconvenience you.

Very truly yours,

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Dear Sir:

You have been kind enough to favor us with an order which we shall endeavor to handle in such a manner as to merit your approval and be the means of further extending our business relations.

We believe that we have as yet no definite understanding concerning the opening of an account, but we assure you that haste will be urged toward this end so that your order may be cared for as soon as possible.

Yours very truly,

**Reselling the Goods.**—In case the information is inadequate to justify the shipment of the first order on full credit, it is logical for the manager's letter to increase the customer's desire for the goods at the same time that a hope is held out for better relations on the basis of better information. Not being able to sell credit, he should resell the goods.

Dear Sir:

We thank you for your first order of November 10 to be shipped on open account. We take pleasure in welcoming you as a customer of this house and we believe the merchandise you have selected, which we note comprises some very good values, will be a means of profitable business to you.

You doubtless desire these goods for early use so that it would inconvenience you should we hold them pending the securing of necessary information which in the present instance we do not seem to possess. Accordingly we suggest that you send us by mail or wire, cash for the amount of half of the bill or instructions to allow the shipment to go forward with sight draft attached to the bill of lading. Either of these methods will be entirely satisfactory to us and will place the goods in your hands in time for you to make the best use of them.

In the meantime we shall prosecute our inquiry as rapidly as possible, and to this end, we enclose the usual form of property statement which we would ask you to fill out in detail. Please write us also a frank personal letter concerning your business expectations, etc., which will help us materially in becoming better acquainted.

With best wishes for your success.

Yours very truly,

## CHAPTER 6

### REFUSING CREDIT ACCOMMODATION COURTEOUSLY

**Turn-Down Letters Hard to Write.**—In the opinion of Dr. F. W. Dignan, for many years the chief mentor and adviser of credit and collection correspondents in the Chicago area, letters refusing credit accommodation are among the most difficult of all that the correspondent is required to write.

Dear Sir:

When we thanked you for the order which you kindly gave our Mr. Brown, we assured you that it would have our best attention, and we immediately made the investigations which are customary in the credit departments of all houses. Your references all speak well of you, but we are sorry to say that we have not been able to procure any definite figures as to what you have invested in your business.

Thinking that you are in a hurry for these goods, and so that there may not be a further loss of time, we are coming to you, direct, with a request that you let us see some figures in regard to your business.

Will you kindly fill out, sign and return promptly the enclosed statement blank, and we shall be pleased to use this as a basis for our credit dealings both now and on future orders with which you may favor us.

The order you have given us is carefully selected and embraces some of our best selling numbers and styles. We trust that it will lead to further business with you, as we are sure that you will like these goods.

We also believe that you will appreciate the frank spirit shown in coming to you direct and expressing a willingness to place our dependence on the figures which you submit from your own books rather than to base our decision on other reports which we may have in our files.

Immediately upon receipt of a statement we shall be glad to give your order proper consideration, and we shall be in a position to handle your further orders without unnecessary delay.

With all good wishes for your success, we are

Very truly yours,

As an example of diplomacy and tact, Dr. Dignan gives a high rating to the above letter written by Benjamin H. Blanton, a credit manager well known in the southern states.

**A Tactful Refusal.**—A house doing business entirely by catalog when refusing credit accommodation tactfully ascribes its action to the scanty information afforded by agencies and urges the customer to deal for cash, pointing out that in this way a basis for credit relations may be established.

Dear Sir:

We thank you for your courteous letter enclosing an order to be shipped on open account. Our soliciting orders through catalogs causes us to experience considerable difficulty in obtaining needed information, so that consequently in very many cases we are obliged to depend largely upon commercial agencies for a credit basis, even though we are unable to guarantee their correctness.

In the present instance we are very sorry to find the mercantile report somewhat unfavorable, so that until we can become better posted we cannot, according to our conservative methods, offer you a line of credit. We therefore hope that you may feel disposed to accept our cash terms for your immediate wants, and we believe a careful consideration of our circular offers will enable you to see your way clear to do this.

We think we can succeed in becoming better acquainted in this way, and we trust such an arrangement may prove temporarily satisfactory. We hope that you will excuse the unavoidable delay in replying to your letter.

Yours very truly,

**Refusal for the Customer's Own Good.**—A merchant tailor in a small Illinois city developed the unfortunate idea that a stock of furnishing goods would add to the profits of his business. On the basis of the information furnished and for the tailor's own good, the credit manager turned the order down; but the tailor unwisely persevered. He discovered another credit manager who was not so high-principled, and laid in a small stock. But his line was not large enough to enable him to compete with dealers in furnishing goods in the locality. At the end of two years he passed through bankruptcy, which he could have avoided by taking the advice given him by the first credit manager.

Dear Sir:

It gives us pleasure to receive your letter of June 18 informing us that you are in the tailoring business and desire to put in a stock of furnishing goods. We are satisfied that our class of merchandise is what will be desired by your trade, but we take it from your letter that you are without capital and would expect us to put in your stock for you.

We regret that we are not in a position to do this, as we are strictly a one-price house, only making shipments to merchants who have sufficient capital invested in their business to finance it properly. We would suggest your arranging to have somebody in partnership with you who would be able to contribute sufficient cash to swing the furnishing goods department.

We trust you will see your way clear to make some arrangements to put in a stock of furnishing goods.

Dear Sir:

We have before us your letter of June 21 which is in reply to ours of the 20th.

Before answering your inquiry regarding whether or not we are in position to extend you credit this season, we should be fully advised regarding your affairs. We are satisfied regarding your character, good intentions, etc., but we desire information pertaining to your financial condition.

This information upon the blank we enclose will be appreciated.

Dear Sir:

We thank you very much for the frank statement of your affairs and regret if it has taken any of your time in preparing it.

We also regret sincerely that after looking it over and giving the matter our very serious consideration we cannot see our way clear to extend any credit accommodation; in fact, we would advise you very strongly against putting in a line of furnishing goods until you have more cash capital with which to do it. We think it would be hazardous, and you are doing so well you ought not to do anything to hurt your present business.

Furnishing goods would without question add to your sales and profits, but you cannot get the right lines unless you have sufficient working capital to pay for them when due. You may get plenty of houses whose lines you would not carry to extend you credit accommodation, but we think it would be much better for you to go ahead another year, when you will no doubt be able to accumulate sufficient capital to justify you in starting in on a small scale, which you could very easily do.

We regret our inability to meet your wishes; we should be very glad to do so if we could consistently.

Yours very truly,

**Asking Additional Capital.**—In another instance a merchant willingly supplied the information requested, but this was so unfavorable as to cause the credit manager to write him expressing appreciation of his attitude but pointing out that were his order filled, he would be doing nothing more or less than gambling on the weather. Additional capital was an absolute necessity. This the merchant was able to supply and the goods were eventually shipped.

The credit manager's letter reads as follows :

Dear Sir:

The information which you mailed me on April 27 has come to my desk; thank you for the promptness and fulness of your answer.

Evidently your resources bear a dangerous proportion to your liabilities, since you are, as you frankly state, somewhat undercapitalized. We appreciate that you are just beginning business, and that your favorable location and the other circumstances in your favor make it probably only a question of a short time before you will be well established. But in the meantime we should be doing you an injustice if we did not point out frankly the dangers of such a position. If your sales materialize as you have reason to expect they will, you will be safe; but if a bad season should intervene, you would be seriously involved. Since you have not the experience of previous sales to guide you in your estimate of your needs for the present season, your only guide must be the amount you can stand to lose, making proper allowances. Evidently in the present case this is decidedly small.

If you can secure an addition to your present capital, say of \$1,500, we shall be glad to let the order stand, though we should advise cutting down the item of overcoats to one-half its size for present shipment, reserving the remainder, if you wish, for a later date in case your locality uses less of these goods than your order estimates.

In the meantime, it is a pleasure to indorse your position of cooperating fully with the house with which you deal, and to assure you that we shall be glad to give you all the help, in advice as well as in terms, which we consistently can.

Very truly yours,

**Asking Cash with First Order.**—A manufacturer dealing with grocers was obliged, following a reorganization of his business, to lay down very strict rules in regard to all first orders.

The explanation was :

Dear Sir:

We thank you for your order through our Mr. Arnold. While we appreciate the business we suggest that in the absence of financial information that would help us to establish a credit for you, this order be sent forward C. O. D.

Our Directors have laid down a rigid rule that all accounts without an established credit should be sent forward on a C. O. D. basis. When the necessary information—that is to say, a statement of affairs or balance sheet—is received and a credit established, then we can, of course, extend the regular terms of 30 days.

You will understand, of course, that this is merely a precautionary measure applying to all with whom we do business, and we trust you will appreciate the spirit in which this letter is written. We are in the same relation to our dealers as you are to your customers, and if you look at it in that way I am sure you will understand our position.

In your case, it is probable that we could establish a credit to an extent sufficient for your needs. Meanwhile in order to save time we would suggest that you allow us to forward this order C. O. D., and we will, of course, allow you a cash discount of 2 per cent.

Please use the enclosed card.

Yours truly,

ACCOUNTANT

A certain house dealing with many unrated merchants handles in consequence a large volume of cash transactions, requiring part cash in advance and the balance on delivery. If a customer overlooks these terms this letter is sent:

Dear Sir:

We appreciate the order you were kind enough to send us, which we hope to be able to fill and ship in accordance with your wishes.

However, as you have overlooked or misunderstood one requirement of our printed terms, we feel obliged respectfully to call your attention to it.

In doing a very large C. O. D. business, very frequently with customers of whose financial affairs we have not been advised, we have found it necessary to ask an advance payment with each C. O. D. shipment of enough merely to cover the freight or express charges and insure delivery. This sum together with the regular discount we shall deduct from the amount of the invoice, and the balance only is collected through your nearest bank upon arrival at your station.

We believe if you will consider the position in which we are now placed, you will comply with our request, and we assure you that your order will receive every possible care and attention.

Yours very truly,



Occasionally one of these customers sends in an order asking credit accommodation, believing that his standing as a cash customer will influence the house to give him credit standing. The following courteous letter is sent him as a means of educating him concerning the basis on which credit is usually granted.

Dear Sir:

Thank you very much for your order of March 8, which we have just received. On referring to your account we notice that while your past transactions have been very satisfactory to us, yet it has been your custom to accompany each order with a remittance. Indeed, there is now standing to your credit a balance of \$425. We are not, however, fully advised as to your credit standing.

The rules of all responsible wholesale houses require that some information be given before they can offer time; this can generally be obtained most speedily from references. If you will be kind enough to name for us your bank or wholesale houses, we will make the necessary inquiries as quickly as possible.

We believe the results will be satisfactory, and regret only the unavoidable delay to your order. We await your instructions.

Yours very truly,

A large hardware jobber was asked for credit terms by a merchant whose stock on investigation was found to be covered by a mortgage. Instead of turning the order down flatly or even simply refusing it courteously, the manager was so favorably impressed by the merchant's personal ability that he offered to ship the goods provided the customer would promise to discount every bill. If this were impracticable, he suggested that 60-day terms could be allowed provided the account could be guaranteed.

The courtesy and reasonableness of the manager's letter influenced the customer favorably, a guarantor was provided, and the goods were shipped.

This letter is given on the following page.

Dear Sir:

We have received and thank you for the order recently given to Mr. Daly, which will have prompt attention immediately upon receipt of your reply to this letter.

All authorities, including Mr. Daly, speak of you very highly in every way, and we have entire confidence in your personal qualifications and do not question it is your firm intention honorably to discharge your obligations. But there is a mortgage on your stock of goods which operates as a first lien in favor of the mortgagee and serves as a menace to other creditors. Our observation, covering an experience of over half a century, has been unfavorable to the extension of regular credit terms under such circumstances, and we want to ask if it will not be agreeable to you to accept our goods, until this mortgage has been discharged, with the understanding that each bill shall be paid promptly within ten days of the date of the invoice less the 2 per cent cash discount. Upon being advised that these terms are satisfactory we will promptly forward the goods.

If for any reason you find it impracticable to accept our shipments on this basis, we could arrange to give you 60-day terms and liberal extensions when needed, if you will have our account guaranteed by some relative or friend whose financial responsibility is strong and above question. Should you decide to act upon this latter suggestion, the enclosed blank will be found well adapted to the purpose. You will notice that the guarantor may limit his liability to whatever figures are inserted in the blank. Your signature as a witness to the guaranty would be proper.

If the guaranty is sent in, please give us all possible information as to the address, occupation, financial responsibility, banking references, etc., of the guarantor.

We trust this slight delay will cause you no inconvenience, and we await your response.

Very truly yours,

## CHAPTER 7

### INFORMATION FROM THE CUSTOMER

**The Property Statement.**—Among all the various sources of credit information, only two can be said to have direct effect on the customer, to increase his interest in his credit obligation. These are, first the report of the salesman, who usually asks the customer some questions even though he may get the majority of his data from outside sources, and second, the information from the customer direct as given in the property statement or in correspondence. The customer should not be allowed to feel that the formalities of giving credit accommodation are empty of the personal quality. Character and personal ability are such important assets as even to outrank capital. Consequently, it is a personal compliment to grant a credit application, and there is every reason for making the applicant feel it as such. A good plan, therefore, is to ask the applicant to write a full letter setting forth his business expectations, and asking the manager's advice about any points he may be willing to mention. If he sees the credit manager face to face, an interest in his personal character can easily be shown and the same is true if the salesman or a representative of the credit department calls on him.

**Showing Where His Interest Lies.**—In all his campaign on the subject of credit education, the credit man should take pains to appeal to the customer's own interest and not merely to his obligations. The customer is very little concerned with the general welfare of the financial world, but he is very much concerned with overstocking or higher prices in his own business. What they mean to him if he does not pay promptly is simply that he is unable to get fresh goods at the best market season, because he has already reached his credit limit. But why has

## STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL CONDITION OF \_\_\_\_\_



Kind of business \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

TO \_\_\_\_\_

{ Name of firm asking  
for statement

[THIS FORM APPROVED AND PUBLISHED BY THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CREDIT MEN]

For the purpose of obtaining merchandise from you on credit, or for the extension of credit, we make the following statement in writing, intending that you should rely thereon respecting our exact financial condition on (date) \_\_\_\_\_ 193\_\_

(PLEASE ANSWER ALL QUESTIONS. WHEN NO FIGURES ARE INSERTED, WRITE WORD "NONE")

ASSETS		Dollars	Cents	LIABILITIES		Dollars	Cents
Cash in bank				Accounts payable for merchandise, etc. past due			
Cash on hand				" " " " " not "			
Accounts receivable (\$ _____ past due)				Acceptances and notes payable for merchandise			
Notes and trade acceptances receivable				Owing to finance companies, banks, or others			
Merchandise not on consignment or conditional sale (flow valued at cost <input type="checkbox"/> or "at cost or market, whichever is lower" <input type="checkbox"/> )				(Secured by \$ _____ of accounts pledged, assigned or sold)			
Other current assets (describe)				(Secured by \$ _____ of notes or acceptances pledged or assigned)			
				(Secured by \$ _____ of merchandise inventory pledged or assigned)			
				Notes payable to banks			
				Payable to partners, officers, directors, or stockholders			
				Payable to others			
				Taxes, interest, rental, payrolls, etc., accrued			
				Other current liabilities (describe)			
<b>TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS</b>				<b>TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>			
Due from affiliated or subsidiary concerns				Mortgage on land and buildings			
Land and buildings at depreciated cost (see reverse side for details)				Chattel mortgage or liens on mchse. and equip't			
Machinery, fixtures and other equipment (at cost, less \$ _____ accumulated depreciation)				Other liabilities not current (describe)			
Notes and accounts due from partners, officers, directors, stockholders, or others not customers				<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES</b>			
Other assets (describe)				<b>NET WORTH</b>			
				{ If Corporation { Capital (Preferred			
				{ If Individual or Partnership { Stock (Common			
				{ Surplus, Earned			
				{ Surplus, Unearned			
				{ Capital			
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>				<b>TOTAL (Liabilities and Net Worth)</b>			

CONTINGENT LIABILITIES—On notes or trade acceptances discounted or sold (not stated above) \$ \_\_\_\_\_. All other contingent liabilities, including those as accommodation endorser, surety, guarantor, or for law suits, judgments, etc. \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Are you a corporation, co-partnership, or individually owned? \_\_\_\_\_ Your terms of sale \_\_\_\_\_

Is it your regular practice to sell, pledge or assign your accounts? \_\_\_\_\_ What amount of your accounts, notes and acceptances is sold, pledged, or assigned to banks? \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Finance companies? \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Others? \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Is any part of your assets (except accounts, notes, acceptances, and merchandise) assigned or pledged as security for any debt, or is there any mortgage or other lien thereon? \_\_\_\_\_ If so, give details of assets assigned or pledged, and details of liabilities thus secured \_\_\_\_\_

Actual date of last inventory \_\_\_\_\_

Does merchandise inventory shown in the foregoing statement represent the value of physical inventory? \_\_\_\_\_ If not, state basis used and date inventory was last reconciled and adjusted with stock \_\_\_\_\_

What amount of merchandise do you hold on consignment or conditional sale? \$ \_\_\_\_\_

What amount of machinery or equipment is held under conditional sale? \$ \_\_\_\_\_ (Balance due \$ \_\_\_\_\_ at \$ \_\_\_\_\_ per month)

If machinery or equipment is under lease contract, state amount of monthly payments \$ \_\_\_\_\_

What amount of claims against you is in attorneys' hands for collection? \$ \_\_\_\_\_

If business premises are leased to you, state term and annual rental \_\_\_\_\_

What books of account do you keep? (Give complete list) \_\_\_\_\_

Does the foregoing statement agree with those books? \_\_\_\_\_ Do you keep cost records? \_\_\_\_\_ Are your books of account audited? \_\_\_\_\_

If so, by whom? \_\_\_\_\_ Date of last audit \_\_\_\_\_

Name and address of your bank or banks \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been established? \_\_\_\_\_ If incorporated, under the laws of what state? \_\_\_\_\_ When? \_\_\_\_\_

(Over)

(Face)

Figure 1. N. A. C. M.

# INFORMATION FROM THE CUSTOMER

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IF PARTNERSHIP, NAME PARTNERS IF CORPORATION, NAME OFFICERS  
(Give residence addresses also)

## DETAILS OF LAND AND BUILDINGS

DESCRIPTION & LOCATION	TITLE IN NAME OF	COST	ACCUMULATED DEPRECIATION	DEPRECIATED COST	ASSESSED VALUE	ENCUMBRANCES	
						AMOUNT	TO WHOM

If land, buildings, machinery, fixtures and other equipment are valued on basis other than cost, explain such basis.

## INSURANCE PROTECTION

On merchandise (fire) \$ \_\_\_\_\_ On buildings (fire) \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
On machinery, furniture and equipment (fire) \$ \_\_\_\_\_ For employers' liability \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
Amount of life insurance for benefit of business \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Do you carry fidelity bonds? \_\_\_\_\_  
What other insurance do you carry? \_\_\_\_\_  
Is any insurance assigned? \$ \_\_\_\_\_ If so, to whom? \_\_\_\_\_

## BUY PRINCIPALLY FROM THE FOLLOWING FIRMS-

NAME	ADDRESS	AMOUNT OWING			
		OPEN ACCOUNT		NOTES ETC.	

## SUMMARY STATEMENT OF PROFIT AND LOSS FOR YEAR ENDED \_\_\_\_\_

Sales (net) _____	Gross Profit on Sales _____	Net Profit on Sales _____
Deduct: Cost of Goods Sold _____	Deduct: Expenses _____	Add: Other Income _____
GROSS PROFIT ON SALES _____	NET PROFIT ON SALES _____	NET INCOME _____
AMOUNT OF ANNUAL SALES FOR CASH \$ _____		AMOUNT OF ANNUAL SALES ON CREDIT \$ _____

## REMARKS:

The foregoing statement (both sides) has been carefully read by the undersigned (both the printed and written matter), and is, to my knowledge in all respects complete, accurate and truthful. It discloses to you the true state of my (our) financial condition on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 19\_\_\_\_. Since that time there has been no material unfavorable change in my (our) financial condition; and if any such change takes place I (we) will give you notice. Until such notice is given, you are to regard this a continuing statement.

Name of Firm or Corporation \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Signing Statement \_\_\_\_\_ Street \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

Witness \_\_\_\_\_ Signed by \_\_\_\_\_  
Residence Address \_\_\_\_\_ Title \_\_\_\_\_  
of Witness \_\_\_\_\_

(Reverse)

Customer's Statement

he a credit limit? For his own protection, as much as for that of his creditors. If his orders are held up, or if he is asked to reduce them temporarily, it is because he has already loaded himself up with as much goods as he can dispose of during the current season, and to take more would be simply to invite disaster. If the channels of his business are already clogged with merchandise, the remedy is not to pour fresh merchandise into them but first to clear the channels by a sale at reduced prices, and thereafter to buy closer to his needs and push sales harder.

The very heart of the credit relation is cooperation. What is to the interest of one is to the interest of all; it cannot be otherwise.

**Meeting Objections to the Statement.**—When an objection is raised by the new applicant to supplying credit information, explanation can be made on the basis of the customer's own interest and on the general experience of the house. "It has always been our experience," writes one credit manager, "that information received from the customer direct is more detailed and personal and consequently gives us a better idea of him than if we were obliged to rely entirely on outside sources. Allow me to say frankly that this is very much to your advantage, and that we are glad to have it so, because your ability to conduct your business is without question your principal asset, and we can form an idea of this that is fair to you only by the frankest correspondence, preferably by a personal interview. If you find this latter possible at any time, we shall be most heartily glad to see you in our office."

**Standard Statement Forms.**—Progressive credit departments provide printed forms on which the customer may give the essential facts in regard to his business. This practice has a twofold advantage. It simplifies the customer's job of assembling the information, and therefore helps to sell him on the idea of providing a statement. And it enables the credit manager to get the particular facts he needs in order to make

a proper credit appraisal. Different forms are provided for use by individuals, partnerships, and corporations, with short and simple forms for small concerns whose accounting systems do not go into elaborate details.

**Special Devices for Securing Statements.**—As every credit manager knows, the task of getting customers to submit statements is rarely an easy one. Some ingenious plans have been devised to bring about the desired result. One of the most interesting and effective of these has been developed by a progressive western firm, which has set up a "Dealers' Help System" for the purpose of putting open book accounts on a secure basis by helping dealers to carry their retail paper. Before the company will accept any of this retail paper it requires the dealer to submit a financial statement on the standard form provided by the National Association of Credit Men. This form is reproduced in Figure 1.

**Comparative Statements.**—A statement as of a given date shows, or should show, how the business stood at that particular time. A series of statements reveals something far more significant—the general direction in which the business is heading.

It is therefore highly desirable for the credit department to secure, if possible, new statements as often as they are available. If this practice is faithfully followed, the credit file on a given account is always up-to-date, and is therefore dependable.

**Demanding Information.**—A hardware jobber received an order from a customer whose affairs he judged to be in a shaky condition. While not feeling justified in holding up the order, he nevertheless wrote a very firm letter demanding full information and pointing out that the merchant's refusal to supply the property statement would operate against his own best interest. The manager went so far as to disclose to the customer the serious information he had received. The letter is as follows:

Dear Sir:

We thank you for the order recently given to Mr. Oaks, and shall immediately forward the goods.

Nowadays it is the practice of nearly all merchants to submit at intervals of not exceeding a year, statements of their financial condition. Sometimes these reports are made through the mercantile agencies and sometimes direct to the wholesalers. So far as we can find you do not appear to have given this information to any one and therefore we lack the data upon which to form a positive opinion as to your financial condition. Mercantile authorities speak well of you in a general way and we believe you are entirely responsible. If it had been your custom to pay your invoices promptly or to discount them, favorable information of that character would be a satisfactory basis for such credit as you may require of us; but when you so frequently permit our invoices to run beyond their maturity before settlement we feel that as a reasonable business proposition, we are fairly entitled to a closer knowledge of the situation. If your financial affairs are in a creditable condition (as we believe them to be) you should not hesitate to take us into your confidence. Any report which you may submit to us will, if you so instruct, be held as strictly confidential and you will find that the better acquaintance between us thus brought about will be beneficial to yourself as well as to us. It hardly requires argument to support the proposition that when a merchant frequently finds it inconvenient to pay at maturity, a frank disclosure of his financial condition, if his affairs are on a substantial basis, will result to his advantage.

If your merchandise has not recently been inventoried, your conservative estimate of its value will answer. Precise and complete figures of the indebtedness are desired, but your books will enable you very quickly to give the information requested in our letters of August 10 and August 20. We again ask if you will not kindly let us have at once the brief report suggested by the printed blank enclosed, and assure you your prompt and favorable consideration of this request will be much appreciated.

Our monthly statement of your valued account showing overdue items to the amount of \$684 is enclosed. Kindly let us know your pleasure concerning them.

Please accept our best wishes for your continued prosperity.

Yours very truly,

**Handling an Extension.**—When the credit manager has made up his mind that the customer's failure to pay is due to his need of the money, he may make use, as does the following correspondence, of his knowledge of local conditions to appeal to his customer's confidence and to get him to respond to an offer of an extension of time.



Dear Sir:

We have received no communication from you in reply either to our statements or our letter of January 31.

We believe that our previous statements must have been overlooked by your clerks, as we well know what pride you have taken in the matter of prompt payment. We have always been glad to have you take our cash discount and on the basis of past relations have been able to give you a more liberal discount than we could afford to allow smaller customers. Won't you investigate this matter personally, as we would like to locate the error.

We are aware that the recent crop failure in your locality has made local collection difficult, and that this may very possibly make it difficult for you to meet your bills with your usual promptness. Again, poor conditions have decreased the sales in your higher-priced lines of goods. If you are impaled upon either horn of this dilemma, please do not fail to let us know, for if we understood the situation fully we could very probably offer a solution.

Very truly yours,

—

Dear Sir:

We thank you very much for your letter of February 2, explaining the difficulties that you are encountering in collecting debts from the farmers.

We are convinced that the situation is purely local and that it is bound to be only temporary. We are glad to extend the time on our matter of \$16.50 for 60 days longer, by which time money conditions will no doubt be much improved in your locality.

Our experience in such matters, however, would lead us to suggest that you do not lay in a heavy winter stock this season, especially in the higher-priced lines. We believe that you might easily injure yourself by so doing, as it would tie up considerable of your capital at an unfavorable time.

We wish you the best of success in your efforts and trust that we may have the opportunity of serving you in the near future.

Very truly yours,

**Use of Notes in Extensions.**—There is, among credit managers, a wide divergence of opinion in regard to the policy of asking for notes in connection with extensions. This applies, of course, to additional time allowed on specific invoices or statements, and not to formal extension agreements entered into by a debtor with all or a majority of his creditors. In

the latter case definite instalment payments are arranged for, and these payments are generally represented by notes.

The chief advantage of the note in ordinary extensions is that it binds the debtor to a definite obligation, which may turn out to be important if the debtor later disputes the account. If litigation ensues, it helps to prove the creditor's claim. But many credit managers believe that this advantage is offset by the fact that debtors frequently give notes to relieve immediate collection pressure, and then fail to meet them at maturity. In this event the collection process has been slowed up rather than accelerated, and the creditor is worse off than before.

Some credit departments have adopted a policy of taking notes on extensions whenever possible, on the theory that half a loaf is better than none. They know that some debtors will fail to have the money ready when their notes come due, but that others will make good, particularly if the paper is placed with a bank for collection. They therefore adopt the opportunist point of view, and collect at maturity as many of the notes as they can.

**Directness Wins Information.**—In letters designed to get information from the customer, stilted expressions and long, involved sentences should be rigorously avoided. Dr. Dignan of Chicago has made the observation that most credit and collection letters are “unpleasant.” His theory is that the correspondent, realizing that he has a distasteful task to perform, takes refuge in “business lingo”; that he tries to cover up the unpleasantness by pushing the *dignity* of the letter, and the elaborate, indirect way of saying things, to the highest point attainable. With the possible exception of the railroad man, says Dr. Dignan, the credit correspondent is the “worst lingoist” in business.

While it would not be difficult to prove that there are many writers of credit and collection letters to whom this generalization does not apply, it is fair to admit that many letters that go out from credit departments are so long and so incoherently expressed that they are bound to defeat their own purpose. A general movement in the direction of simpler, more direct

letters would have an exhilarating effect on all credit and collection correspondence.

Credit managers, as a class, are certainly not inarticulate. Most of them talk well enough—in short, crisp sentences, rich in good serviceable Anglo-Saxon words. All they need to do is to apply the conversational method to their correspondence. When they learn to write very much as they speak, directness and simplicity will make correspondence much less irksome for them, and also for their customers.

## CHAPTER 8

### REFUSAL TO SHIP GOODS

**Refusing Courteously.**—In most cases where customers are alienated and accounts permanently lost by refusal to ship goods, it is not so much the *fact* as the *manner* of refusal that causes the final break. Lord Birkenhead, speaking in the House of Commons, complimented Asquith's diplomacy by quoting these lines from Congreve's "The Mourning Bride":

"Whom she refuses she treats still  
With so much sweet behaviour  
That her refusal, through her skill,  
Looks almost like a favour."

The ability to make refusal look like a favor has often enabled credit managers to stand firm on a policy of non-shipment and still avoid an open break with the customer.

Dear Sir:

Your order of the 10th for a shipment of hockey skates was most welcome. We have a particularly fine line of them this year, and are proud of having equipped quite a number of collegiate and professional hockey teams.

When the order came I looked up your account, following our regular procedure, and was a little disturbed to find that three invoices for August and four for September were still uncovered by a remittance.

Now I want to ask you frankly whether you would supply one of your own customers with a pair of skates on credit terms if he still owed you for a tennis racket and a bathing suit. That is just about the position we are in with you.

I wanted so much to fill your order promptly that I took it up to the "high command." He turned me down and left me no choice but to withhold shipment until the August and September invoices are covered.

Let's pull together now! I have the skates all ready to ship. If you'll wire, at our expense, that you are mailing a check I'll have them on the way in less time than it takes to say "Bill Cook."

Very truly yours,

When discreetly used, refusal to ship is one of the most effective of all collection methods. It requires, however, exceptional tact and patience, as well as a knowledge of human psychology.

These qualities are observable in the above letter, written by the credit manager of a wholesale sporting goods house to one of his slow customers.

**Holding Up the Order.**—An absolute refusal to ship his goods is the last step a credit manager is willing to take, but he is very frequently confronted by the need to hold up orders until the customer's indebtedness for previous orders is settled.

A furniture manufacturer had a slow-pay customer who was nevertheless entirely good for the amount of his order. There came a time when the manufacturer was oversold. He took advantage of this situation to write the following frank and good-natured letter to the slow-paying merchant. It was so successful that he says, "I have used it several times; in the first case it brought in the cash where three previous requests had failed. In every instance it retained goodwill—in fact I think it made us better friends."

Dear Sir:

We have just received your order No. . . . . of (date).

To be perfectly frank with you, Mr. . . . . , we may inform you that due to the unusual rush of business this spring, we have so many orders on file that we are obliged to cancel a good share of them and concentrate our attention on filling those received from customers who have paid their bills promptly, or who give us reasonable assurance that they will do so.

We are enclosing a statement of your account which dates way back to (date). You surely must admit that we have been very lenient in not pressing you harder than we have for payment, and you will no doubt understand that the present classification we are obliged to make in filling orders is not only the natural course to follow, but is necessary to protect the interests of the many customers who have always met obligations promptly.

Upon receipt of your remittance in full to cover your long-past-due account, or at least a substantial portion thereof, we shall fill the order on file, and see to it that you receive the goods in due time to meet your requirements.

We trust that you will comply with our wishes.

Yours truly,

**Ten Short Letters.**—Simple letters dealing with similar situations are the following:

Gentlemen:

We are in receipt of your recent order given to our salesman, and are preparing the merchandise for shipment.

We find, however, on referring to your account, that invoices have now fallen due amounting to over \$ . . . . It is some time since we have had a payment from you, and before forwarding your order we request that you favor us with a remittance of \$ . . . . to apply on account.

Very truly yours,

---

Dear Sir:

We wrote you on June 27 regarding your account and our inability to proceed with the shipment of your pending order before this balance was straightened out.

Of course, the order being practically all for Fourth of July, you will not be in need of it at this time. However, we will gladly give attention to any portion of it that you desire filled, and hope to have your account in such a condition as to admit of our adding promptly any charges that may cover further orders you may send us.

Yours truly,

---

Dear Sir:

The merchandise which you selected while in the house recently amounts to a little over \$ . . . . as indicated by the enclosed invoices. We find, however, on referring to your account, that you are now owing us \$ . . . . and before shipping your purchases it will be necessary for you to send us a remittance sufficient to bring the account down to \$ . . . . , the limit agreed upon. Upon receipt of your check for \$ . . . . . we shall be pleased to make prompt shipment of your recent order.

Very truly yours,

---

Dear Sir:

We earnestly hope that you will acknowledge our letter of June 27 at your earliest convenience, as we are anxious to dispose in some satisfactory way of your pending order of June 16.

Yours truly,

Dear Sir:

July 15, the date set for the shipment of your order of June 16, is close at hand, and we are accordingly very desirous of receiving your instructions, as we have suggested in our former letters.

We hope you will have the kindness to write us before the date in question, and we hope also that the information to be offered will assist in our reaching a definite understanding not only on the order now under consideration, but also on later purchases.

Yours very truly,

---

Gentlemen:

We regret very much the need of directing your attention to the bills on your account that are delinquent, but inasmuch as they stand in the way of our executing your order just received, we have no other recourse.

We trust that your remittance for the items of May 31, amounting to \$74.29, may reach us by return mail so that your present order, which is already packed, may be shipped at once.

Yours very truly,

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Dear Sir:

While not unwilling to add the charge of July 2 to your account, we find that there are two bills, one dated April 5, amounting to \$17.13, and the other dated May 18, amounting to \$51.39, which have not been remitted for.

It is essential, under our rules, that all bills be paid within forty days from their date and also that future charges be withheld from accounts that are delinquent. We trust that the propriety of your remitting for these items will appeal to you, to the end that the present order may be shipped without a moment's unnecessary delay.

Yours very truly,

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Dear Sir:

We have written you on various occasions regarding several orders that are still pending in our files, but have not received your reply.

Please understand that as far as your financial worth is concerned we should be glad to extend your credit for a much greater sum than is represented by these orders, but the difference on the account to which we have already referred seems to stand in the way of their prompt execution and we should be pleased to have your explanation regarding this balance as soon as convenient.

Yours very truly,

Dear Sir:

We are in receipt of your postal asking us to hurry shipment of your goods, but we appear to be without response to our letters of June 14 and 20.

We shall be very glad to proceed with the shipment if you will send us a deposit to apply on the order and give us permission to send draft with B-L to your bank.

Kindly inform us by return mail so that we shall know how to proceed.

Yours very truly,

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Dear Sir:

We are in receipt of your letter of July 2 and regret you did not feel able to send us a remittance to enable us to ship the order which we are holding. We have the goods all packed and ready to go to you, and if you do not expect to use them on the terms suggested, will you kindly inform us under cover of the enclosed stamped envelope so that we may return them to stock without further delay.

We assure you that it would give us great pleasure to ship the goods on open account, but in view of the delinquent nature of your payments for some time past and the fact that you are not able to promise any improvement, we do not feel able to make the shipment in this way.

We shall await your reply.

Yours very truly,

**A Good-Natured Appeal.**—A shoe manufacturer who felt the need of warning a careless customer wrote a cordial and good-natured letter reselling the goods and asking payment of the previous invoice so that this order might be shipped.

Dear Sir:

Let us thank you for that nice order for shoes which has just come in through Mr. Wales. Your selection shows that you know what good values those boys' Bluchers are.

But we find, Mr. Markel, that your last invoice is somewhat overdue, and, as you know, our policy prevents us from extending further allowances while things are in this shape.

No doubt you have let this matter go longer than you intended, and we shall expect to get the amount our bookkeeper has against you in the course of the next week.

We shall go right ahead getting the shoes ready for you, and will have them on the floor for shipment in ten days' time.

We wish you the best of success with your school trade.

Yours very truly,



A certain jobber had tried for some weeks to secure a reply to his collection letters and, at length, on asking courteously for an explanation, received a brief letter saying that collections were poor but that after the holiday season the merchant would be able to pay in full. As he had already exceeded his credit by a considerable sum, it was not thought safe to ship the additional invoice without security; moreover, the manager felt that by proper exertion the merchant could collect sufficient of his own outstanding accounts to forward a remittance. Accordingly he wrote as follows:

Dear Sir:

It is a matter of great regret to us that we have been obliged to act unfavorably upon the request made in your letter of November 20.

While we appreciate the peculiar circumstances which have made it difficult for you to reduce your outstanding indebtedness so as to bring it within the allowance agreed upon, still we are unable to allow the present order to go forward without receiving a substantial remittance, of say \$150, to apply on past accounts. You will appreciate that though a house may be glad to extend all possible favors, it must act in the interests of all its customers as well as of itself, by maintaining such terms as are consistent with the safety of all concerned.

At the same time, we understand your urgent need for the goods now packed and awaiting shipment, and we believe they would have such a ready sale that you would be justified in securing the amount needed. It is difficult to secure at this late date goods which will give you a satisfactory Christmas trade, and this trade, of course, you do not wish to lose.

We shall hope to be able to ship the goods, and shall hold them until December 3. In the meantime we assure you of our most cordial good wishes, and our desire to be of service.

Yours very truly,

**An Ultimatum.**—A merchant had been allowing his indebtedness to accumulate and continued to send in his orders for spring goods. The credit manager had carefully explained to him the impossibility of continuing to make shipments under these conditions, but when further orders were received, he issued an ultimatum, hinting that, being his largest creditor, he was in a position to make serious trouble for him, and reminding him that he should be settling his bills.

Gentlemen:

We are just in receipt of your orders from Mr Cunningham, one for neckwear which we have sent to the department to be manufactured, the other for hosiery which we note is marked to go at once. We have also sent this to the department, but we regret we do not see our way clear, as we have previously indicated, to make further shipments until after the past-due account has been materially reduced and some definite arrangement arrived at for weekly payments.

We simply cannot ship spring goods with practically the entire fall and winter account unpaid. We wrote you a very long letter in regard to the matter on April 13. The favorable spring weather, which no doubt you have been enjoying, and will enjoy for the next two weeks, ought to enable you to make a decided impression upon your indebtedness to us, which must be a very considerable portion of your entire indebtedness.

Yours very truly,

**Making a Fair Proposal.**—Another credit man in dealing with a notoriously slow-pay and shifty customer made a very clear statement of what should be the attitude of a merchant who was unable to pay in full. Instead of being content merely to acknowledge the arrangement, he enforced the moral of the situation, though in a diplomatic manner.

Gentlemen:

We have yours of July 1 addressed to the writer, and thank you for it. We have always felt where any merchant, in view of conditions over which he has no control, finds himself unable to meet all of his bills when due, that he should, after paying his actual running expenses, divide his receipts pro rata among his creditors. Not only is this fair and equitable, but it is good business policy. Every house then knows that it is receiving its fair share of the receipts, which is all any house can ask, and it should be willing, as you state, and you will find it very generally ready, to grant such extension as the conditions make necessary.

It will be perfectly satisfactory to us if you remit us each week during this month, in accordance with your business and other obligations.

Yours very truly,

**Proposing Instalments.**—The credit man who has gone direct to his customer for information is able to write with corresponding frankness on the basis of the data secured, a thing he might not be able to do if the information had come

from outside sources. The specific arrangement laid down in the following letter is based, as the reference indicates, on the customer's own statement.

Gentlemen:

When we wrote you on May 5, acknowledging your check for \$100, we expressed the feeling that, in view of the amount you were owing us, which represents, according to your statement, all that you were owing from last year, we might naturally expect another check at once to apply on the account, especially as spring trade has opened up and you should be doing, even with all conditions considered, a reasonably satisfactory business.

May we not expect a remittance of at least \$250 to apply on your account, to reach us by Monday, May 17, and a remittance for at least \$100 a week each following Monday thereafter until the account has been fully paid? Even this arrangement would take you six weeks, or until the 1st of July, to take up bills which were due and payable last year.

Yours very truly,

**A Plain Statement.**—In a similar situation the credit manager made a strong appeal to fair play, as the statement disclosed that the customer had taken a shameful advantage of his leniency on the ground that being his largest creditor this house would not deal severely with him. Further shipments for spring trade were promptly held up until the fall invoices had been settled.

Gentlemen:

While we thank you for your statement just received, which we note to be under date of April 30, it is with most sincere regret that we note ours are the only bills of last year that are unpaid, and according to our books your bills with us run back to last September and October and November.

While we desire to have our customers feel that we are most willing to cooperate with them at all times, we would hardly expect them to take advantage of our consideration. We therefore feel that before making shipment of the spring goods, our past-due account should be taken up, especially that portion of it for last year, which approximately amounts to \$611, statement of which has been sent you.

On receipt of your remittance for this amount we will be glad to forward the goods on order for spring.

Yours very truly,

**A Last Appeal.**—After receiving the above letter the customer declared that payment was impossible at the time and that he should be obliged to buy his spring goods elsewhere. The manager might have based his response entirely on fear. He could have gotten this merchant into serious trouble by taking him at his word and cancelling his order. He could have dealt a permanent blow to his credit standing by making his condition public. But long experience had taught him that such men could be brought to terms and converted into good and valuable customers; besides, he knew that the retail merchant does not always consider very carefully what he writes in answer to collection letters.

Consequently he based his entire appeal upon fair play while his last sentence did no more than hint at possible cancellation of the order.

Gentlemen:

We must say that we received yours of May 8 with check for \$ . . . . with very sincere regret. It would seem to us the fact you are now owing us \$ . . . . on last fall's bills past-due, would merit a better treatment than to have you feel that, because we are not in a position to ship goods for spring until your past-due account has been very materially reduced, you should be forced to buy your goods elsewhere. It would seem to us that you ought to feel you are under obligation to buy your merchandise from us, and arrange to pay for what you buy in addition to reducing your past-due account as fast as possible.

We cannot look at it in any way but that you should buy what you need from us, paying for it, and making weekly payments of \$ . . . on the past-due account until you have it in such shape that we shall again be able to go along as we have done in the past.

We have your spring orders still on our files awaiting some disposition. We believe the above policy is due not only us but yourself. You certainly ought not to blame us for the fact that you have permitted practically your entire fall bills to run until spring. We are quite at a loss to understand why you should make us the losers for having been generous and so considerate with you in regard to your past-due account.

We wait your pleasure, and ask you to advise us what conclusion you come to so that we shall know what disposition to make of the goods on order.

Yours very truly,

## CHAPTER 9

### REQUEST FOR CREDIT STATEMENT

**Where the Customer Refuses Information.**—"You are surprised at my leniency," said the credit manager of a certain jobber, "and all the more so when you found me writing long letters to 'bring a man to time' who was incorporated for only \$5,000. Now this particular retailer is hot-headed, and he is none too good a business man, as the state of his accounts indicates. But the size of his account never makes any difference with the fair treatment I give a customer. Moreover, he has many years of business life before him. Suppose that at the expense of the little time I and my assistants take in writing him, or the comparatively small amount of money we lose by carrying him so generously on our books, we can bring about a change in his personal attitude and method of doing business. If we take an attitude of opposition we shall certainly not succeed, and then of course there is the chance that he might fail, in which case we should lose still more heavily. If we convert him, he becomes a source of good business to us, and every man who becomes a better merchant helps to stabilize the general mercantile condition. Such letters as these look a long way into the future."

Two letters from the correspondence referred to are given below. In the first, it will be noticed that the creditor had asked for a remittance and a property statement, as a condition of shipping a large spring order. The merchant paid his bill but flatly refused to give the information asked, saying he would prefer to cancel his order. The manager based his entire appeal on the customer's sense of justice.

The hot-headed customer replied, charging the manager with having insinuated certain charges against him. Although it was apparent that no fair reading of his letter was open to such an interpretation, the manager wrote a painstaking and courteous reply, using the occasion to "sell credit."

Dear Sir:

It is with the most sincere regret that we received yours of April 6, and note the spirit in which it was written. You say that you are surprised at our attitude towards you as you certainly thought we were good enough friends to allow you to impose upon us for the small amount you are owing. Does it occur to you that that is not quite the kind of a letter that should be written to a concern to whom you were remitting at that time on payment of bills due last fall?

Would our attitude toward you, during last season, when your spring bills were not balanced until October, and during this season when your fall bills were not paid until April, indicate that we have been helpful and cooperated with you, or does it indicate that we are subject to criticism?

We will, of course, comply with your request and cancel the goods on order, but we do so with the greatest regret, first, because we want to continue to do business with you, and second, because we regret that you do not feel that our consideration justifies our having the information which we requested, and to which evidently you take exception, as you certainly cannot take exception to our treatment of your account, either last season or for the preceding season.

Our recollection is that you are incorporated for \$5,000. You have never made us a statement of your affairs since you first started in business, some three years ago. It has been our custom with all of the merchants trading with us to ask for a statement from time to time, as we feel that by so doing we are in a position to keep in touch with them and be of assistance to them. We believe a second consideration of our treatment will unquestionably lead you to take action that will permit us to ship spring goods.

Yours very truly,

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Dear Sir:

I am seriously concerned with that part of your note of April 26 which is underlined, namely, that "you insinuate things that we would never be guilty of doing."

We certainly appreciate your business. We believe our treatment of your account up to now indicates this, and we are sincerely at a loss to understand what you take exception to in our present position. It would hardly seem to us that you could object to our desiring to have some definite understanding with reference to the payment of last fall's bills before shipping the goods on order for spring; nor do we feel you could take exception to our having asked for a statement of your affairs. We have no hesitancy in asking any concern with whom we do business for such information. We have been in business fifty-three years; we have forwarded statements at the end of each inventory, twice a year, to the principal agencies and to our banks; and any one with whom we are doing business even today is in a position to secure exact figures with regard to our affairs.

Entirely independent of your reinstating your order with us, which we have regretfully canceled, we would very much appreciate your advising us just what part of our letter you took exception to. As we understand it, you are incorporated for \$5,000. While the condition of your affairs may be in every way satisfactory, we have no means of knowing it. The responsibility rests entirely on the condition of your business, as there is no personal responsibility in an incorporated business.

You say that during all the time we have been doing business with you we should have satisfied ourselves as to the moral risk. Never for one moment has there been any question of the moral risk in our mind, but if you could have our experience for only a short time, you would find out very conclusively that honest people fail in business, and fail to succeed in business, and there must be some basis for credit other than confidence in the moral risk, although that is the actual basis of all credit.

You state you have splendid backing, with reference to which we have no knowledge whatever. Your position, that you do not make statements to any one, is quite unusual in these days, when every merchant recognizes the right of the extender of credit accommodations, whether it is his banker or the houses with whom he is dealing, to have definite information that will enable the goods to be shipped understandingly. This matter of doing business is not only one of profit, but should be one of mutual confidence. We believe we have the same right to expect your confidence as you have to expect ours. We believe we have as much right to know the condition of a business to which we are shipping goods, as the dealer, on his part, has to expect us to demonstrate our confidence in his condition and his intentions.

The confidence must be mutual. We certainly have demonstrated our confidence, when we remind you that your remittance of April 8 took up the bills that were due last fall, and we are entirely at a loss to understand why you, on your part, should not show the same confidence in us, by being willing to give us the condition of your business, which should be the basis for credit with us.

As we stated in the first place, entirely independent of whether we ship you goods for this spring or not, we would like to have you advise us what things were insinuated, or to what part of our letter you felt you were justified in taking exception.

Yours very truly,

**Request for Credit Information.**—When such patient, friendly reasoning has altered a merchant's point of view with a resulting increase in his prosperity, the credit manager may well be encouraged for his future endeavors. An instance is given by an official of a well-known house, which resulted

happily for all concerned. The manager had received private information that the customer's affairs were approaching uncomfortably close to the danger point. Not wishing to reveal the source of his information, he wrote an urbane letter direct, enclosing a blank form of statement to be filled out by the doubtful customer.

Gentlemen:

Our credit files show that you take your inventory usually about the middle of February, and as it is customary with us to revise our credit information from time to time, and as we have had no recent information from you, we take the liberty of asking you if it would be convenient to place us in touch with your present condition

We trust it will be your pleasure to send us this information on the blank we enclose (or any other form you desire will be equally satisfactory). We hope the outlook is favorable in your section for a prosperous spring and summer business.

Yours very truly,

As he expected, he struck fire; the customer indignantly refused to make a statement of any kind.

Gentlemen:

We are in receipt of your letter of February 16, and would like to know where you get your information from, stating that we take our inventory in the middle of February. Beg to advise you, that we take our inventory January 1 and July 1, and we cannot see why we are under obligation to you to give you a statement of our affairs, as we make them to Bradstreet's and Dun's, and if they are not satisfied as to our rating we certainly do not want you to take any chances on us. This is the first mercantile house that has ever asked this of us. While we are not at all hesitant to make a statement at any time, we are not receiving any amount of credit of you that should justify you in requesting a statement.

If our account is not satisfactory to you, kindly let us know at once so we can arrange without inconveniencing you or us.

We regret that we cannot comply with your wishes.

Yours respectfully,

The creditor's reply justified in masterly fashion his practice of going direct to the customer for information, and suggested that the closing of the account would be entirely satisfactory to him.



Gentlemen:

We have your letter of February 21, and regret you do not feel disposed to send us the statement requested. The reason we wrote you direct was that we did not find any statement for last year in the agencies, whose report we have before us, the last statement sent us in response to our recent request being that of the preceding year.

The reason we felt the necessity of recent figures was that not only has your small account with us been slow but from reports we have before us, we note you have been slow in many other quarters. It is not, of course, necessary that you should give us the statement unless you desire to do so. When we want definite information we always feel perfectly justified in going direct to the customers; they certainly know more about their business than any one else, and we did so in this case because we did not find it in the agency sources. We have always felt the more closely we are in touch with our customers and their affairs the better able are we to serve them, and we make no apology in asking any concern to place us in touch with the condition of their business.

We would not feel justified, under the circumstances, in forwarding the goods without the statement. We will again write the agencies and ask if they have your recent statement on file, and if they have, ask that they forward it to us. When we receive it we will be pleased to give it our careful consideration and advise you whether we feel justified in shipping the order we have upon our files for spring. In the meantime, should you prefer cancellation of the order, it will be entirely satisfactory to us.

We await your pleasure in the matter.

Yours very truly,

This was just the firm hand which the customer needed. He had in the meantime cooled off and realized how heavy was his moral obligation to the wholesaler who had supplied him with goods and granted him courteous treatment over a period of years. His response shows him in a chastened frame of mind.

But this was happily not the end to the affair. The merchant followed up his letter with a visit in person, accompanied by his partner, and the resulting interview gave the manager a chance to go thoroughly into their affairs and to give financial advice which eventually was the means of putting the customer on his feet.

The merchant's letter of gratitude closes this interesting series.

Gentlemen:

We are in receipt of your letter of February 24. After reading it over we had to look up our file to find the letter that I had written you on February 21. I can assure you that I felt very much chagrined, as I must have been out of sorts when I wrote this letter. This excuses no one, but I must apologize for writing this letter as it sounds very sarcastic indeed.

I have gone over our files and find we have not sent in our report to Dun & Bradstreet, as I expected had been done, but they will go forward today, and I am enclosing you a copy of same.

You refer to our account; we admit that we were a little slow with you, as the overgrowth of our business has kept us from meeting these accounts as promptly as we should, but we trust it has not inconvenienced you to a great extent. I should have written you regarding it after receiving your statement, but neglected to do so.

We trust you will overlook this letter that we wrote you on the 21st and await your reply.

Yours respectfully,

Dear Sir:

It is certainly a pleasure for me to write you this letter, as I wish to inform you that through the very meeting that you, Mr. Smith, and I had in your office, and the time that you gave up while in your city, I have found out how to get my business properly financed. Through the advice that you gave us, coming here and studying our business thoroughly, I was enabled to take it up with my directors and my bank, and they have furnished me ample means to pay off all my creditors and placed me on a strictly discounting basis.

The meeting that we had I shall never forget. We shall be in your city before long, taking up the subject of how to attend to our future buying. We trust you will answer that you will allow us a little more of your time, when we visit you.

It has taken me seven years to get this business financed and I can assure you that I have got a load off my shoulders now. I want to make it a strictly money-making business, and any favor you can show us along this line we shall try to reciprocate, by giving your house as much of the business as possible.

Kindly let me hear from you.

Yours respectfully,

**Educating the Customer.**—From the narrow point of view, the task of getting the customer to submit a statement is a problem in salesmanship. The credit manager who looks at the job from this restricted viewpoint is likely to try to *argue* the customer into compliance with the request. A broader

conception, regarding the problem as one of education, would bring better and more lasting results.

Consider, for example, the relation between a big city wholesaler and one of his customers who runs a retail store in a small town. The retailer is busy with his daily grind of petty routine. His business is small, his bookkeeping of the simplest kind. If the wholesaler asks him for a statement he may have only a hazy idea of what it is or why the wholesaler wants it. But if the wholesaler is clever, in a letter or two he can open the retailer's eyes, widen his horizon, and show him the place (essential, even if small) that he has in the whole picture of distribution. His business education once begun, he develops quickly from a storekeeper into a merchandiser. He also becomes a cooperator, and to the supplier who has lifted him out of a rut he will gladly give statements and other data.

This is illustrated by a letter from the credit manager of a wholesale grocery concern to a country customer :

Dear Sir:

This is in reply to your letter of March 8, in which you say that you "don't know what we are driving at" in asking you for a statement showing the present condition of your business.

We are driving at the establishment of a credit relation which will enable us to sell groceries to you, in quantity and at a fair profit, and enable you to resell them to your customers, at a profit to yourself.

Our safety—in fact, our continuing in business—depends on selling only to retailers who have sufficient working capital, merchandising ability, and enough paying customers to provide a satisfactory turnover. We asked for the statement because that is the only means we have of finding out how you stand in regard to these important factors in business success.

Please believe us when we say that providing this statement will be of as much advantage to you as it will to us. Without it, you cannot acquire a credit title, which is one of the retailer's most important assets. We are asking of you only what we require of every retailer who applies to us for goods on credit terms.

The form we sent you is a very simple one, especially designed to cover a small business. We feel sure that in view of what we have said in this letter you will fill out the form and return it to us at once.

Expecting to hear from you soon, we are

Very truly yours,

## CHAPTER 10

### CONSTRUCTIVE CREDIT POLICIES

**Cutting Down the Order.**—Another option of the credit manager who wants to ship his goods is to cut down the size of the order. This can be handled in such a way as to give no disadvantage to the customer, while protecting the creditor. The manager may suggest that the order be broken up in several shipments to be sent forward as the customer may require. This enables him to keep his capital employed, while at the same time it enables the manager to hold up further shipment in case payment is not forthcoming.

The following series of letters shows a remarkably constructive attitude. It is an unusual example of the credit man at his best, as a seller of credit.

Dear Sir:

We are taking up the shipment of fall goods, and as we desire to keep in touch with you and your affairs we should like to have you send us, if you will, a memorandum showing the total amount of your purchases for fall

While the addition of recent capital will, of course, be of material assistance, and while we recognize that you must order more liberally in advance, in view of your distance from this market, at the same time we hope that you will not make the mistake that is so frequently made by merchants, of ordering too largely in advance. Then, if conditions are not as favorable as you anticipate you will not be overstocked at the end of the season, with a consequent too large indebtedness.

We believe a liberal purchase for fall would be not to exceed 50 per cent of what you have full reason to feel will be your sales for the fall and winter season; for instance, if you expected to do \$10,000, on which you would look for a profit of \$4,000, the goods sold during the entire fall and winter season would cost you \$6,000. It seems to us that an advance purchase of \$3,000, at the outside, would be as much as you would be justified in making.

We thank you for this information and wish you every success in the future.

Yours very truly,

Dear Sir:

We acknowledge with thanks your letter of August 3. One or two inquiries about you have come in from our neighbors, which we have been pleased to answer. We feel that there is a most favorable disposition toward you, evidenced not only because of your character and the feeling on the part of all that you are willing to work hard and be economical, but also because of your willingness to give information freely and frankly in regard to your affairs. It is a pleasure to indorse your position in this respect.

Now, in regard to the shipment of fall goods: while we should like to start shipment when you need the goods, at the same time we feel that our existing past-due account should be, if not entirely paid, at least very materially reduced before we are expected to ship. We are, as you will note by our recent letters, quite concerned as to whether you have not bought more in advance for fall than you should, but as we understand that you have arranged for these goods in different shipments and can, if necessary, cancel the later shipments, we see that you have a chance of recovery if you find that the orders placed are in excess of what you will need.

We hope that you will be able to give us a payment to apply on our past-due account, and outline some definite plan for weekly payments to apply on the balance, so that the entire amount or virtually all of it may be taken up before you are in need of fall goods.

Let us assure you of our desire to cooperate with you in every way we consistently can.

Yours very truly,

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Dear Sir:

After we had O K'd for shipment your fall orders amounting to about \$1,075, we received yesterday your order for shirts from Mr. Taylor for immediate shipment, amounting to \$650.

We regret that it is quite beyond our ability to extend a credit of this amount, making practically \$1,700, as you are now owing us \$1,092. That was the reason we wrote you as we did, asking you to put us in touch with the exact amount of your advance fall purchases and advising you to cut them down, showing that you were not justified in buying too largely in advance, and that you should not anticipate your sales for more than four months at the most.

With your sales of \$20,000 a year and your profits of approximately \$5,000—they may be a little more than that—the goods you would sell in a year would cost you \$15,000. Possibly your last six months will be the best and the goods you would sell would cost you \$8,000; but this would be for the entire season from the 1st of September until about the 1st of March—six months—and \$4,000 would, in our judgment, be very liberal advance purchases. You

informed us that you had cut down your advance purchases to this amount and this included, of course, the amount purchased from us. We are now in receipt of this additional shirt order which, though we presume you need it, at the same time we are unable to forward, as we feel that the amount of credit accommodation we are already extending is very liberal and really more than we are justified in giving.

You are still owing us \$108 upon an invoice of June 10, due July 10, and now two months past due.

We should be pleased to hold the order and to make any arrangements for its shipment that you suggest.

Yours very truly,

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Dear Sir:

It was a pleasure to receive your letter of September 14, and again we thank you for the spirit shown in writing us. It is not that we lack confidence in either your ability or your honesty, but we feel that we are already extending a line of credit fully as large as we are justified in doing, taking all things into consideration.

In fact, there is no justification for the amount of credit accommodation we are extending you now on a business basis. It is only because we find you concentrating your business with a few houses and the right kind of houses, and because you show a willingness to abide by their judgment and give them information in regard to your affairs, that we have been willing to go as far as we have.

We shall be pleased to receive the remittance to take up the bills past due, which we note you intend sending next week.

We shall be very glad to hear from you regarding shirts or any other goods you need at any time, and you may always expect careful and serious consideration on our part. We believe, however, that with the amount you have from us now and with orders from time to time supplementing your stocks, it ought to be possible for you to get along during the season.

Yours very truly,

**Turning Down an Old Customer.**—The regular financial statement is the barometer of the merchant's business. When it shows that a storm is approaching, the credit manager to whom it is submitted will begin skilfully to reduce the amount of his business with the customer so as to be entirely "under cover" when the storm bursts. One manager who had been proceeding conservatively with regard to a certain customer received a letter from him containing his property statement

and asking why his salesman had not called. The manager decided to write frankly and show the merchant whither he was drifting.

Dear Sir:

Thank you for your financial statement of January 20. Under the laws of your state, so much of the value of the homestead listed would be exempt that it can hardly be regarded as a basis for credit to your firm. Leaving it out of consideration, your assets appear to amount to \$ , against which there are liabilities aggregating \$ . . . ., the net surplus being \$ . . . .

Your report . . . showed an indebtedness of \$ . . . against a business investment of \$ . . . , leaving a net worth of \$ . . . . The residence was not included in this calculation. The report of . . . showed business assets \$ . . . , liabilities \$ . . . ., net worth \$ . . . . The report of . . . showed business assets \$ . . . ., liabilities \$ . . . , net worth \$ . . . .

A comparison of the figures just received with those submitted in the earlier reports indicates a decided retrogression in your financial affairs. Not only is your surplus smaller, but your liabilities are very much heavier in proportion to your resources. In fact, it seems to us that your present indebtedness is dangerously large as compared with your business assets, so that we are forced to the conclusion that you are rapidly drifting in the wrong direction, and that unless some radical changes are wrought in your financial and business policies, you cannot in the end avoid serious embarrassment.

Being fearful of giving offense, we have hesitated thus frankly to express our apprehensions to you, but you have been patronizing us for some time and we earnestly desire your success, so that at the risk of being criticized for offering gratuitous advice, we are giving you the benefit of our observation and experience in such matters. We trust you will take these suggestions in good part and weigh them carefully.

Until there has been a marked reduction in the amount of your indebtedness, we cannot, we regret to say, continue to solicit your orders on the regulation credit terms. We shall hope, however, to hear soon that you have succeeded in bringing about such improvements in your financial matters as to relieve you from all danger of embarrassment.

We shall be glad to give you service in any way which lies open to us.

Very truly yours,

**Following Up Part Payments.**—When a delinquent customer has made the plea of inability to meet his total indebtedness and an arrangement for weekly payments or settlement on

some other basis has been arrived at, the credit manager must follow up this plan carefully to make sure that promises are being kept. The courtesy and leniency which has permitted the agreement can be made the basis for a strong appeal to justice and fair play, while the debtor can also be reminded of previous occasions on which he has been well treated.

Gentlemen:

Our Bookkeeping Department has again called our attention to the balance due on spring bills, most of which matured May 1, and the further fact that during the month of May we received but \$236.30, and so far this month \$200. We were under the impression from your letter of May 17 that you would send us weekly remittances.

We have had no money from you for nearly three weeks, although it was distinctly understood that our spring bills were to be paid promptly. We trust, therefore, that it will be your pleasure to send us a remittance to cover at least one-half the amount due (\$456.40) during the coming week, that is, the week of June 21, and to send the balance the week following, the week of June 28. We consider this a very liberal suggestion and will expect your prompt compliance therewith.

Yours very truly,

In a similar case the manager assumed that a check may have already been sent, and in the latter part of the letter implies that the account may have been overlooked by subordinates.

Gentlemen:

Upon referring to your account at this time we note we have not received a remittance from you since the \$250 which reached us on March 8. If a substantial check has not been sent by the time this letter reaches you we shall expect you to give your immediate attention to the account.

We have been crediting you very largely during the past season and handling your account with the utmost leniency, but it is not going to be possible for us to advance your account from week to week without some money. We desire this letter to receive the personal attention of the member of your firm who looks after the finances, so that he may arrange for us to be supplied with a substantial check each week. Our ability to continue an account with you will depend entirely upon whether or not our present account receives satisfactory attention from now on.

Yours very truly,



**An Appeal to Fairness.**—Various points are logically taken advantage of in the following letter. It points out that the remittance is entirely too small to allow shipment of spring goods, although had half of the fall bills been taken care of by this time, the shipment could have been made. The customer, moreover, has treated the creditor unfairly in view of his unusual leniency granted because of the extraordinary business conditions in his city.

Dear Sir:

We want to acknowledge and thank you for your letter of April 11 enclosing a check for \$250. While we are glad to receive it, it makes a pretty small hole in nearly \$ . . . of indebtedness, almost all of which is for last fall, and therefore long past due. As much as we regret to inconvenience you in the slightest, we cannot consistently make shipment of spring goods until our past-due account has been materially reduced. Had you taken care of one-half of your fall bills by this time, we would have been glad to make such shipment of spring goods as you needed at the start, and continue shipments from time to time while in the meantime you were paying on the balance. However, with practically all of the fall bills owing now, when spring business is started, much as we would like to favor you, we could not consistently increase the credit at this time.

The amount you are owing us is about one-fourth of your entire indebtedness, and during all of the past few months we have received nothing of your receipts.

We fully realize what business conditions are, especially in your city, otherwise we should never have permitted the account to go on from week to week and month to month as it has. No house, we believe, has been more liberal to you than we have been, in increasing the amount of your credit from year to year, and in increasing the time allowed you each season to pay up. The amount now owing on last season's bills absolutely precludes the possibility of our making shipment of spring goods except upon a cash basis, until our past-due account has been very materially reduced and some definite arrangement made for weekly payments to take up the balance.

It is with the greatest regret that we find that your lack of remittances to us in the past three months has placed us in a position where we must write you as we are doing now.

Yours very truly,

**A Tactful Rebuke.**—Arrangements carelessly entered into and not fully comprehended by the debtor for whose benefit they are made, should be carefully explained to him in detail when he defaults upon them. It is to be noticed that the fol-

lowing letter avoids saying, as it might have done, that a very definite promise had been broken, and it likewise avoids saying that the creditor will proceed to extremities. It hints at both these ideas, but closes with a strong appeal to fair play.

Gentlemen:

It has been over two weeks now since your last remittance. We are under the impression we had a definite understanding that we would receive weekly payments, in view of the very considerable amount that is owing us, most of which is past due.

In your letter of April 30 you stated that you intended sending remittances each week, that in all probability you would increase the amount. We certainly would regret exceedingly any treatment of our account which would force action that would either inconvenience us or embarrass you, but under the present conditions we cannot continue the amount of your past-due account unless we receive weekly payments of not less than \$ . . . each, the time having elapsed when we are willing to accept weekly payments of \$ . . . . .

During the months of June, July, and August, you should have no difficulty in sending us \$ . . . a week. Even this plan will take you from now until the 1st of September to pay bills, most of which are on last year's account.

We regret to feel that our desire to be as considerate as possible with your account is being imposed upon.

Yours very truly,

**The Note of Finality.**—The following letter, while expressing a desire to be reasonable, contains a note of finality not to

Gentlemen:

When you wrote us on April 22 at the time you sent \$50, we naturally expected that you would continue your remittances from week to week until your past-due account was entirely paid. We are, therefore, very much disappointed to have waited over three weeks without having received any additional payments.

We do not feel you are justified in asking, or we in granting, any further extension on this account. We certainly have not received our share of your receipts, which is all we ask or expect. Even now, however, we have no desire to embarrass you, but we must insist on weekly remittances for not less than \$100, the first to reach us not later than Wednesday, the 23rd, and continuing each week until your account, both due and coming due, shall have been taken up. This arrangement is most liberal as it will take you, according to our books, some two months to take up bills due and now coming due. We shall expect your prompt compliance with this reasonable suggestion.

Yours very truly,

be misunderstood. Coming at the climax of negotiations, it secured action from the debtor and resulted in his final re-instatement.

**"Selling" the Discount.**—One of the chief values which any credit or collection department has to sell is the discount. In certain lines of business, such as certain parts of the rubber trade and the garment trade, this discount is so generous that any merchant should find it profitable to borrow at the bank in order to avail himself of it. But even when the amount is 2 per cent or 1 per cent, the articles sold on these terms usually permit of a prompt turnover, so that discounting becomes a very profitable feature of one's business. The creditor's interest in the discount is naturally greater than the customer's, for he offered the bonus in order to reduce his load of outstanding indebtedness and to make his capital available for business undertakings.

Accordingly, letters urging merchants to discount their bills are written by nearly all credit men at one time or another. "In simple justice to yourself, you ought to be taking it," writes one man. "I owe it to you," says another, "to bring very earnestly to your attention and in detail the advantages to be had from discounting." "Don't pass up the discount," says another. "Your profit may be in it."

The following long and interesting letter was effective largely because of the strong appeal it made to the customer's pride as well as to his desire to make money. With this "flying start" the letter proceeded to point out that the customer's business with the creditor had actually been decreasing; yet in spite of this, he was asking the creditor for such extensions of time as practically to put the creditor in the position of financing those competing houses which were also selling to this customer. A striking appeal to fair play ended this section of the letter, and a strong appeal to the customer's money-making instinct, together with expressions of confidence that appealed to the customer's pride, brought the letter to a close.

Gentlemen:

We wish to acknowledge your letter of February 21 in which you refer to your account and say that it will be cleared up in a short time. This is satisfactory to us and we are glad to be of service to you in this respect.

We have a very high regard for your firm and a full appreciation of the pleasant relations which have existed between us. Accompanying that is a sense of duty which was very acute at the moment of reading your letter. Because of our long friendship and the fact that your interest is our interest, we want to suggest that perhaps you are falling into a detrimental habit in losing discount.

This has been a subject of discussion between us for several years and we have not changed our opinion in the slightest degree, but are more certain than ever that you do not do your store justice when you finance it through wholesale houses.

We do not want you to feel that, if you actually needed an extension of time in the ordinary course of business, because you were unable to go to the regular sources and obtain such capital as you required, we should not be perfectly willing to help you, but to lose discount amounting to vastly more than the interest charge, when such a loss is entirely unnecessary, puts a drain on your business which no organization can bear continually.

You say that you have made heavy advance purchases to provide against the radical increase in prices, but evidently these purchases have been in other goods than men's clothing, for your orders with us show only normal purchases; in fact, we did less business with you last year than we did the year before.

This means then that whatever extra purchases you have made have not been in our line and that, even so, you are asking us to aid in financing those purchases. We are not objecting to that in this particular case, but the justice in a matter of that kind is so clear that you would not and could not expect us to make a practice of it.

We really deserve more business than we are getting from you. We believe that when our salesman comes to see you again you ought to eliminate these conflicting lines and do for us what we are doing for you, namely, give us all you have in our grade of goods because we are confining the sale of our line to your store.

In writing you thus, we are primarily concerned about the future of your store and we hope we may yet succeed in showing you the mistake which you continue to make in not arranging to discount bills promptly on maturity dates. It is only when a business is properly financed that it becomes really profitable and it is only under such a condition that one feels free to promote it to its ultimate possibilities.

We have always felt that your business has not by any means reached its limit and we should not be at all surprised if you could make a hundred per cent increase in your volume beyond what it is now. We should like very much to work with you intimately with that object in view.

Yours truly,

**Reforming the Discount Abuse.**—The cooperative movement headed by the National Association of Credit Men is gradually reducing the evil of the abuse of the cash discount. It is hard to make the customer feel ashamed of bad practice in this direction, because he knows it to be so common; merely to denounce it does not often bring results. With the same earnestness and goodwill that he shows in selling credit, the business man must sell the idea of a reform in this abuse, until he brings the offenders over into the army cooperating for this purpose.

There are two factors which are materially aiding the fight on the discount chiseler. The first of these is the regularity with which trade associations and business conferences go on record as opposing the abuse of cash discount terms. The second is the growth of round-table groups which meet at frequent intervals to discuss their common credit and collection problems. These groups are organized by industries or according to types of businesses sold. This makes it possible for all members to be warned that a concern is an habitual taker of unfair discounts. By refusing to sell this chiseler except for cash, his buying market is restricted. Concerted action by the trade groups is one of the most effective means known of forcing this type to observe the seller's terms of discount.

A new weapon in the hands of the seller appears to be in the Robinson-Patman Act. Many believe that the taking of unearned discounts is a violation of the provisions against price discrimination. If this proves to be true, the seller must refuse to condone the taking of an unearned discount either by returning the check or billing the customer for the amount unlawfully deducted.

**A Discount Piracy Letter.**—Correspondence calling attention to abuse of the cash discount privilege may be materially strengthened by referring to the attitude which is taken by the National Association of Credit Men toward discount piracy.

An effective letter used by a shoe manufacturing concern is the following :

Dear Sir:

We note that in connection with your remittance received this morning you deducted discount amounting to \$12.85 on items paid from 8 to 12 days after the 10-day period had expired.

This is, of course, in direct violation of the discount principle, and we must insist that the difference be adjusted at your earliest convenience.

As members of the National Association of Credit Men we are pledged to resist, in every possible way, the present tendency to stretch the stipulated 10 days into 20 or more. We hold rigidly to the sales terms which are plainly printed on our invoices, and we expect our customers to do the same.

We leave it to you to decide how the difference shall be adjusted. If you will forward check for \$12.85 to cover the discount unfairly deducted, we shall appreciate the courtesy. If you prefer to have us charge the amount to your current account, we shall be glad to do so.

Very truly yours,

**Offering Constructive Service.**—The tone of the two following letters is interesting, as is their frank statement of the dangerous financial position in which the customer stands.

Gentlemen:

Please accept our thanks for sending a copy of your recent inventory showing assets \$....., liabilities \$. .... and a net worth of \$ ....

A comparison with the figures of a year ago indicates that you have reduced your percentage of indebtedness from 49.7 to 48.07 per cent, but you made a further loss in your net worth of \$. ....

While you overlooked giving us your sales and expenses, we suppose that the loss is due to the fact that your stock is still too large in proportion to your sales, and that you have necessarily had to cut prices to an unreasonable degree in order to dispose of your goods.

The situation, as it appears to us, is so serious that you ought to make an effort immediately to correct it. Just how it is to be done, we cannot tell you at this distance, but we shall be very pleased to send a man to you who can help you analyze the condition and perhaps outline a definite plan for a solution of the numerous problems which must be solved before you will ever make money again.

Mr. . . . has managed successfully several retail stores and understands thoroughly the proper methods of merchandising, advertising, and financing which are generally employed by successful merchants. He can go to ..... at almost any time after 10 days from now, if you want him, and he can stay two or three weeks if he can be of service to you.

He would proceed with our fullest confidence and you can entrust to him all the secrets of your business. It is only with the hope that he would have your confidence that we would want him to make the effort at all.

This suggestion is made primarily in your interest, although we admit we have a selfish motive also. We have been doing business with you so many years, and so pleasantly, that we are desirous of making every effort to continue.

We have written you many letters in the past, and we hope that you won't think that this is just another one of those communications of protest and admonition. We feel that now is the time to do the things which we have expressed the hope you would do, but which have, either because of timidity or a false sense of pride, been delayed.

To delay longer, in our opinion, would be absolutely fatal, and we hope that you won't let anything interfere with your making definite plans at once.

Yours truly,

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Dear Sir:

Since our representative returned from . . . . ., we have talked over pretty carefully the condition of your affairs. We are sorry that you have allowed the profits of your business to be withdrawn so regularly by the monthly payments to stockholders, and we are sure that you will admit it has been a mistake which should be corrected with as little delay as possible.

You undoubtedly have been putting these withdrawals into outside investments, which probably have not proved as profitable as the mercantile business has been for so many years. Our suggestion is that you put back some of the capital which you have withdrawn, even if it means a certain amount of sacrifice in these outside holdings. If there should happen to be a loss in this connection, it would be offset by the increased profits from the mercantile business after a very short period.

After arranging this particular matter, your efforts should be directed toward the reduction of your stock, the elimination of as many lines as possible in every department, and the installation of a complete set of records which will give you detailed information about your business constantly, which you do not have at the present time. There are other things which we might recommend, but these are the chief ones which should have your attention without any delay.

We are going to try to make ourselves as useful to you as we possibly can, but it is not hard to put your finger on the difficulties; you already know what they are and we have absolute confidence in your ability to straighten them out.

There is one thing that we have never taken up with you which we think ought to be disposed of at this time. It is customary in all cases where we deal with corporations to ask for a guaranty signed by the stockholders. This has come up since we became incorporated ourselves, and we have the guaranties of most of the corporations which we deal with. It has been on our minds to take it up with you before.

We are enclosing one of our regular blanks herewith, which we have made out for \$30,000. This is in excess of your order, but will provide for additional orders which you may send us.

Of course, this blank will have to be sent to . . . . for the signature of . . . . , but we will not hold up the spring goods until it is received. If you will advise us that . . . . and you have signed it, and that you believe . . . . will do so, we will begin shipments right away.

We believe thoroughly in your business, and its ultimate success. There have been certain evils which have crept into it, which have not been eliminated as fast as they have appeared, and we feel a little guilty in not keeping in closer touch with you in the last three or four years, because we have been watching these evils developing. It is sometimes unwise to be backward about expressing an opinion, and we are sure that you would have been glad of any criticisms which we may have cared to make in these few years.

We know that you will solve the problems in the right way, and we assure you of our best cooperation.

Yours truly,

It remains only to say that the customer met every suggestion of the creditor in the same fine spirit in which it was offered and that with their cooperation he has established himself on a sound financial basis.

**Using the House Organ.**—The ideal house organ is written in the spirit of the family letter which goes from one member to another in the spirit of mutual helpfulness and interest. It has a splendid opportunity to sell credit, especially by articles or stories which point out the dealer's own interest in abiding by the principles of sound business. The house organ of a well-known jewelry manufacturer printed an article entitled, "Don't Buy Too Many Peanuts at Once," a story of an Italian fruit-stand man who taught his nephew the peril of overstocking by allowing him to go through the hard experience of bankruptcy so that he might learn never to do it




again. The story, you will notice, said nothing about *jewelers* who overstock, but the moral of the tale was plain.

Bankers, credit men, and financial authorities of every kind are often glad to respond to the request for articles on credit to be inserted in house organs. Salesmen can be asked to write articles from their experience. Now and then a customer can be found who has learned some lesson of good credit in the past and is willing to recount his experience for the common welfare.

**Envelope Inserts.**—Special bulletins or booklets, reprints of magazine articles, accounts of addresses delivered, clippings showing the statements of prominent men, are good material

### Did You Ever Stop to Think



That cash discount terms are a carefully predetermined factor in fixing the price at which merchandise is sold?  
Business needs your co-operation in fulfilling the sales contract. *Fairness in respecting discount terms is an absolute requisite to sound business practice.*

THE CASH DISCOUNT APPLIES FOR A LIMITED PERIOD—OBSERVE THIS LIMIT AS YOU WOULD A LEGAL AGREEMENT.

**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CREDIT MEN**  
One Park Avenue                      New York City

Figure 2. N. A. C. M. "Envelope Stuffer"

to use in the campaign of education that arouses interest in credit. The National Association of Credit Men is tireless in its efforts to bring the importance of credit to the attention of business men and gladly cooperates with credit managers who wish to obtain effective material to use in dealing with their customers. One of the "envelope stuffers" issued by this association is reproduced in Figure 2.

**Advertising to Aid Collections.**—The Credit Men's Association of Detroit, Michigan, conducted an advertising campaign through the columns of the *Detroit Free Press*, using large space, and emphasizing the advantages of credit to the

community and the importance of prompt pay, both as a matter of pride and as an asset in the struggle for success.

"National Pay-Up Week," conducted in various localities according to plans suggested by the *Merchants' Trade Journal* of Des Moines, Iowa, has a similar effect in educating the community in the principles of credit and collection. Its immediate effect on collection comes through a strong appeal to pride and cooperation; by urging everybody to "get into the game," it removes the sense of shame which is one of the strongest factors in keeping delinquent retail customers from walking up to their creditors and settling old bills.

## CHAPTER 11

### COOPERATION WITH THE SALES DEPARTMENT

**Determining Sales Policies.**—"Our credits are made before our salesmen go on the road," said the credit manager for one of the greatest wholesale houses in the world. "Our salesmen are told just whom to approach. That makes the management of our credit and collection department comparatively simple." Doubtless this is a fortunate position, but it is also a fact that not all sellers of merchandise can occupy it at the same time.

"I don't see how you can sell those people," said one credit man to another. "I don't see why you can't sell them," replied the other with a chuckle. "I make \$50,000 every year on business you turn down."

If all credit men were to deal only with gilt-edged credit risks, a large part of the United States would go without merchandise. The skilful credit manager secures information from sources which his competitor overlooks; forms judgments from indications invisible to the ordinary observer; educates the poor risks into the "good-pay" class; and by the use of some mysterious sixth sense detects the signs of disaster and protects himself before the crash comes. By exercising caution at all points, instead of only at the period of credit appraisal, and by using constructive measures instead of only negative ones, he increases the business of his house without increasing its dangers. Safeguarded by his skill, his house can undertake sales policies that would otherwise be impossible. The new company, the company hard pressed by competitors, the company obliged to use the instalment plan as the only means of marketing its goods—these are among the many examples of houses that have need of good credit men.

The voice of the credit man must be heard in determining all sales policies. He must see to it that goods are not over-sold either by advertisements or salesmen; that no promises are made which the house will not back up; and that abnormal credit risks are not involved in the marketing plan.

**Failure to Coordinate Means Loss.**—The basic facts with regard to the relations between credit and sales are that if the credit man turns down orders that could be accepted, the company loses business; and if the salesmen sell, careless of credit, the company loses money if it accepts their orders and loses the customer's goodwill if it turns them down.

"We coordinate our departments," says the general manager of a large clothing manufacturer, "by having them under the same direction. The work of our sales department is done almost exclusively by the same people who have charge of the advertising and the credit. For our purposes this is a better arrangement than to split it up under separate heads whose relations to each other sometimes conflict."

Each new sales plan should have a corresponding credit and collection plan.

**Linking Arms With the Salesman.**—"Our salesmen are 100 per cent representatives of our house," says the president of a manufacturing company. "When they enter a customer's store, we teach them to say that they are not *from* our house but *of* our house."

Morale—which means enthusiasm, loyalty, fighting spirit—is the secret of success in any organization, and no system of cooperation between sales and credit will succeed without a strong morale. The salesman, like the customer, must be sold credit.

The natural inclination of the salesman is to sell. He is not a clerk and he does not like to make out long reports. He naturally inclines, moreover, to champion his customers against the credit department, to make favorable credit reports in doubtful cases, and to "go easy" on collections. He finds it easy to sympathize with the customer who has been drawn on, or has had credit turned down, or an order held up, or

in any way has been disciplined. The goodwill of the customer is his bread and butter, and it is small wonder that he seeks the easiest road to goodwill.

But the salesman can be "sold" credit; he can become a hearty advocate of the credit man's point of view. With the right propaganda to encourage morale, he can be made to see that his advantage lies in promoting the objects dear to the credit man's heart. Without the right propaganda to encourage morale, even the salesman's selling power will decline.

A famous credit manager remarked, "Getting a salesman to pay attention to the work of our department has been like making water run up hill; but it has been done. They give us the finest kind of cooperation if we take the pains to show them what our work means to them. I now feel that if a salesman slips up in his credit work, the fault is mine and not his." His salesmen are interested not only in selling but also in credit, and by this means he increases their pride in their work. The excellent record of collection in a salesman's territory and the low annual turnover of customers are items in which he may take a genuine pride. They are a measure of his loyalty as well.

**Where the Salesman's Interest Lies.**—Every good salesman knows that sound credit and prompt collection are an asset to his house; but not every salesman is persuaded of the credit department's ability to do its job well. The credit department must demonstrate to him its willingness and ability to increase sales; to link arms with him in the constructive task of building up business.

**How the Salesman Can Help.**—Collections need not be a regular part of a salesman's duty, but he should be thoroughly conversant with the policies of the credit and collection department, and he, as well as the members of the department, should have a clear vision of the marketing plan of the house as a whole.

The chief ways in which the salesman can help credit and collection departments are the following:

The good salesman :

1. Obtains credit information as the basis for the first order.
2. Educates the customer as to the terms of the house.
3. Avoids overstocking.
4. Avoids forcing goods on an unwilling customer.
5. Resells a customer, after delinquency, goods, credit, and service—adjusts grievances between the customer and the credit department.
6. Educates the customer in better business methods in order to increase goodwill, to help the customer pay for his goods, and to build him into a source of better business.
7. Watches the customer's "character, capital, and capacity" in order to advise the credit department in :
  - (a) Enlarging his line of credit.
  - (b) Decreasing his line of credit.
  - (c) Pushing collections before bankruptcy.
  - (d) Helping to avoid bankruptcy.
8. Advises the credit department as to the most effective means of collection with regard to :
  - (a) Local trade condition.
  - (b) The customer's business condition.
  - (c) The customer's personal peculiarities.
9. Helps to collect difficult accounts.

**Obtaining Information.**—One credit manager told his salesmen, "The most valuable things you can tell me about a retailer are the things which enable me to picture him when I am writing letters. Is he a big, heavy fellow with sandy hair and a hearty laugh, or is he small, thin-faced, and dark-eyed? Some of the same information that helps you to sell him, will help me make my collections." Evidently this collection manager appreciated that collection is resale. Another kept on file photographs of his customers and their places of business that proved of value in helping to handle distant accounts. It is a good plan to urge salesmen to cover the back of the usual information blank with personal data that may be valuable to the credit department.

The printed list of questions which the salesman is asked to answer should be short and restricted chiefly to those items of personal information which none but the salesman can

SALESMAN'S NEW CUSTOMER REPORT

TO BE FILLED OUT AND SENT IN WITH EACH NEW ACCOUNT.

IF UNABLE TO OBTAIN COMPLETE INFORMATION SUPPLY AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE.

DATE.....  
 SOLD TO.....P. O. ADDRESS.....  
 STATE.....

## INDIVIDUALS IN FIRM

NAMES.....AGE.....MARRIED.....  
 .....

## IF A CORPORATION

OFFICERS.....  
 .....

KIND OF BUSINESS.....HOW LONG IN BUSINESS.....  
 EVER FAILED.....EVER BEEN SUED.....  
 CHARACTER.....BUSINESS ABILITY.....  
 DOES BANKING WITH.....

## FINANCIAL STATEMENT

<u>ASSETS</u>		<u>LIABILITIES</u>	
CASH.....		ACCOUNTS PAYABLE .....	
ACCOUNTS RECEIVABLE.....		NOTES PAYABLE.....	
BILLS RECEIVABLE .....		MORTGAGES, REAL ESTATE .....	
MERCHANDISE.....		MORTGAGES, CHATTEL.....	
REAL ESTATE.....		OTHER LIABILITIES.....	
HORSES AND WAGONS.....			
TOOLS AND MACHINERY.....			
OFFICE FURNITURE.....			
OTHER ASSETS.....			
.....		TOTAL.....\$	
TOTAL.....\$		SURPLUS.....\$	

INSURANCE CARRIED ? .....  
 BUYS FROM FIRMS NAMED BELOW:

NAME	ADDRESS
.....	.....
.....	.....
.....	.....

WRITE YOUR OWN OPINION  
 ON OTHER SIDE.

SALESMAN.....

Figure 3. Salesman's Report

A brief and satisfactory form for some kinds of business. It shows the salesman at a glance the important points wanted by the credit manager. Note the value attached to the salesman's own opinion.

obtain so well. In the preparation of material for the present book the writer examined the credit files and information blanks of many houses, but it was a rare experience to discover one completely made out. The conclusion seems to be either that the salesman should receive some added incentive for collecting answers to a long list of questions or that the list of questions should be reduced in number and the salesman shown the importance of answering every one of them. A form of salesman's report is given in Figure 3.

One important feature of the salesman's information is the fact that as his investigations are made on the ground, he may disclose sources of strength not revealed by other kinds of information, thus enabling the credit department to *increase sales*. The house which cannot employ a traveling credit representative in such cases will find it worth its while to train salesmen to grasp this important opportunity—the credit department always reserving the right to interpret the information for itself.

**Education as to Terms.**—In educating the customer as to the terms of the house, the salesman has a great opportunity to show that his company stands for service in all of its departments, and that the credit manager considers the interest of the customer on a par with his own. The salesman should thoroughly understand the reasons for the existing terms and should be fortified with all the arguments in favor of short terms, close collections, rapid turnover, and discounting of bills. He can prove that these matters exist for the customer's welfare, for the benefit of the whole industry, manufacturers, jobbers, and retailers alike. But the credit and sales departments must work in harmony and convince the salesman that these arguments are really sound and that his interest lies in supporting them. Otherwise the salesman is all too likely to form a party with the customer against the credit department. In dealing with the customer the salesman can appeal not only to his self-interest but also to his pride in conducting an effective business. Frequently, too, he can appeal to the customer's loyalty to the house.



**How to Avoid Overstocking.**—Training enthusiastic salesmen not to overstock their customers is one of the hardest tasks of the credit department and an impossible task unless the sales department works in harmony. The salesman should be shown the effect of overstocking on failures, and the consequent loss of business to the house. The evils of overstocking from the point of view of the sales department, the salesman, and the customer may be summarized as follows:

First, overstocking is one of the most common causes of retail bankruptcy.

Second, bankruptcy of the retailer means the loss of goods and money to the company and the loss of an established trade outlet. It means the labor of securing a new account and the risk entailed in opening relations with an untried customer.

Third, a share of this labor and loss falls on the salesman in that territory.

Fourth, an overstocked merchant cannot buy so frequently and uses a smaller amount of goods in a season, thus being less profitable to the salesman.

Fifth, an overstocked merchant cannot grow into an outlet for the goods of the house with more profit to the salesman.

"Our salesmen ought to say to a merchant at the end of a visit, 'Now the total of your sales is \$2,400,' but does he? Not a bit of it. He knows the merchant would be terrified and would turn right around and cut down the order; whereas, perhaps if the goods were actually delivered, the merchant would grit his teeth and sell them. So the salesman waits till he gets to the next town before sending back an itemized list of purchases and even then he doesn't show the total. Of course, one result of this policy is hard collections and another is cancellations." This credit manager's statement reminds us why a salesman oversells and how to correct the evil.

**The Evils of a Forced Order.**—Few accounts are so hard to collect as those for goods which the retailer did not want to buy but had forced upon him by an overbearing salesman. However, as this is the usual excuse of unscrupulous dealers who habitually cancel many of their orders, it must be scrut-

inized carefully when offered. In like manner the house must make sure that no just grounds exist for offering the excuse. The retailer who cancels orders is in the same class with the woman who wears a dress to a party and sends it back to the department store the next morning. Both wish to gratify their vanity by pretending to be able to buy goods they cannot afford. The campaign against this abuse has little value unless the salesmen are thoroughly enlisted and come to see that by forcing goods on customers they defeat the attempt to remedy a serious evil.

**Adjusting Grievances.**—When a customer is slow in payment and resents the collection methods employed, the fault does not always lie with him and with the salesman. The reputation for hard-hearted inflexibility fixed upon the credit manager's much-enduring head is sometimes deserved. No educational campaign or set of executive orders can prevent an intelligent salesman from siding with an abused customer against the credit manager who has made arbitrary or careless rules, or who in his collection methods shows no understanding of the customer's position. But where wise policies have been adopted and have been thoroughly explained both to the salesman and to the customer, they can see that the credit and collection departments are playing the rôle of constructive merchandisers, eager to help the retailer do the largest business consistent with sound policy. Then the salesman becomes a loyal aid to the manager and can be relied on both to educate customers to pay and to adjust grievances that arise with the credit and collection department.

**Watching the Customer.**—"Vigilantia" is the watchword of the National Association of Credit Men, and vigilance must still be the keynote of the effort of the salesman, when watching the customer's character, capacity, and capital. His ear must be alert to catch the first rumblings of possible bankruptcy and to protect the interests of his house.

While this is the salesman's first duty, it is not his chief opportunity. It is the negative rather than the positive aspect

of his task in keeping his eye on the customer's credit. The waste resulting from lost collections, from money charged off the books, is small compared with the waste resulting from the failure to take advantage of business openings, to enlarge trade outlets, to build up better business by studying local opportunities and taking advantage of them.

The salesman is naturally eager to sell goods; he knows that the credit department is naturally eager to reduce the line of a merchant who is in difficulty. When the salesman makes up his mind that his colleagues in the credit and collection department are builders of business and are eager to enlarge the line of credit of a deserving merchant, then the salesman in turn will be more interested in keeping vigilant watch on a poor-pay customer. His own interest is equally concerned in both matters.

**Advising as to Collection Methods.**—A common part of the salesman's duty when gathering information is to discover what method of collection of the payment the customer prefers. The collection department usually keeps notations, based on its experience with individuals, of the methods which have proved most effective in each case. In gathering these notations the salesman can be of service. His opportunity is not limited to making a pencil mark opposite the line "Does not pay draft," but through his personal acquaintance with the customer he can suggest the most effective line of approach. The salesman who has an insight into resale methods and the psychology of collections as suggested in this book, is not obliged to invent collection methods, a field in which he is not supposed to be a specialist, but has merely to suggest which method is the best. The salesman's advice on this delicate subject must, of course, be discounted in view of his natural tendency to leniency toward the customer.

**The Salesman as Collector.**—The salesman's great asset in collections is his personal contact with his customers, which allows the give-and-take of conversation that letters can never quite equal. Moreover, he embodies for the customer the idea of constructive business, so that his advice as to the relation

between prompt pay and good business is likely to fall on receptive ears. "I want you to pay this money," the salesman says, "so that I can sell you more goods, for certainly I'm not going to get you into trouble by loading you up with too heavy an outstanding indebtedness. In the long run that would hurt you far more than for me to press you for payment now."

If collections are to be regarded as a stern enforcement of the law, then the salesman makes a poor collector, for the reason that the retailer regards the salesman as an expert on sales; he expects him to have enthusiasm and anticipates being inspired by his enthusiasm. If he comes to look on the salesman as a man who makes trouble for him when payment is slow, he will be less willing to buy from him; his morale as a captain in the merchandising army will be badly shaken, and he will have less courage in attacking his share of the volume of goods to be distributed.

But if collection is resale, then the salesman can render assistance in collection. Then the collector and the salesman both use the skilful, tactful approach; then the collector appeals not to fear only, but to pride, loyalty, self-interest, and other motives which feature also in making sales; then both have as their primary object, whether in collection or sales, the desire to "keep the customer." Whether the salesman is securing credit information as the basis of the first order, or is educating the customer as to terms, or is collecting difficult accounts, or is performing any other of the functions just outlined, he will be most successful when he "sells" credit or "sells" prompt payment. It is natural for him to appeal to pride and self-interest. This he can do on the occasion when his services are asked in making collections.

**A Friendly Letter that Brought a Reply.**—The credit manager for a jobbing house has in his files a memorandum which runs as follows:

"A few weeks ago Mr. Jones asked salesman H. A. Wahl to prod one of his customers into paying us some money. Mr. Wahl thereupon wrote what strikes me as an inoffensive but

effective letter. It resulted in an immediate response to our several unanswered communications."

Dear Sir:

I have not had the pleasure of calling on you for some time owing to the fact that you are considerably behind with us. I have before me a copy of the letter sent you October 6 and in it I find that you have not replied to any of the former letters we sent you. You know the feeling you would have for one of your customers who would not pay any attention to the letter you sent him. He would have some excuse, not being versed in business methods. But you are a business man, and I cannot explain to the house your not answering.

Since the past-due bills date back to January, I believe you will agree with me that our company has extended to you more than ordinary business courtesy, and that they are certainly entitled to the \$160.07 covering your past-due account.

I enclose addressed envelope. Please write me by return mail regarding your account. At the same time I would suggest that you mail direct to the house the amount stated above, as their letter to me takes a very firm stand.

With kindest regards,

Your friend,

"Memo. Retain the foregoing as a form and when we ask a salesman for like assistance send him this letter by way of suggestion."

**Persuading Salesman to Cooperate.**—When salesmen are compensated on a point basis, special points can be given them for selling old customers and cutting down the turnover of trade; for a good showing in collections from their territory; for low percentage of cancellations; and for low percentage of turned-down orders. A contest on any or all of these points, and the list of winners printed in the house organ; or a chart regularly kept on the wall of the manager's office showing the relative standing of salesmen in these matters, will go a long way toward developing enthusiastic cooperation.

The sales collection, the house organ, and special bulletins to salesmen are the best media for proving to the salesman how he is helped by the credit manager and his staff.

Armed with figures and anecdotes of experience, a forceful credit manager stood up at a sales convention and won

over the entire sales force to a belief in the need for careful collection. His chief argument, supported by case after case, was that where a customer owed money, he would not see the salesman, his orders went elsewhere, and the salesman lost percentages. In one case where an account had been outstanding for several months and the salesman could not sell the retailer because of the unpaid bill, conference with the credit manager resulted in the suggestion of instalment payments each week. Then the account was paid without trouble, and the retailer at once placed his new orders.

As was said at the beginning of the chapter, the responsibility for education of the salesman lies with the credit department. Salesmen are naturally inclined to believe that if the credit man were not so unreasonably strict, he would extend a delinquent customer a little more time and a little more credit and allow the salesman to sell another bill of goods. The credit man sees that this is dangerous heresy, but he forgets that the salesman's mind is concentrated on other problems. It is his function as a specialist to help the salesman to see things from his point of view. The truths he has to utter continuously about the dangers of overstocking, and the advantages of quick turnover and prompt pay are, it is true, obvious, but what is obvious to one man may seldom occur to another.

Whenever an instance occurs to show how increased business or the prevention of loss has resulted from cooperation between the sales and the credit departments, the managers of both departments should note the instance in their files for the information of their organization. At each sales convention, let the salesman have a regularly appointed visit with the credit manager, just as he has with the sales and advertising manager. Credit information should be put into the sales manual. The salesman should be called into consultation in case of a difficult credit to see whether there is some basis on which shipment can be made, and to see also whether the customer can be brought on a full credit basis. Carbon copies of the letters from the credit department to customers should be sent the salesman, and in every way he should be kept in touch, while he is on his route, with the standing of the customer's account.

**Use of Gum Stickers.**—The credit department of the Aluminum Cooking Utensil Company of New Kensington, Pa., has made effective use of gum stickers in securing the cooperation of their salesmen in collecting overdue accounts. Fred S. Bennett, credit manager of the company, bases his collection policy on the assumption that the salesman who sold the order is the best man to collect a past-due account. Immediately after the first of each month the credit department sends the salesmen an

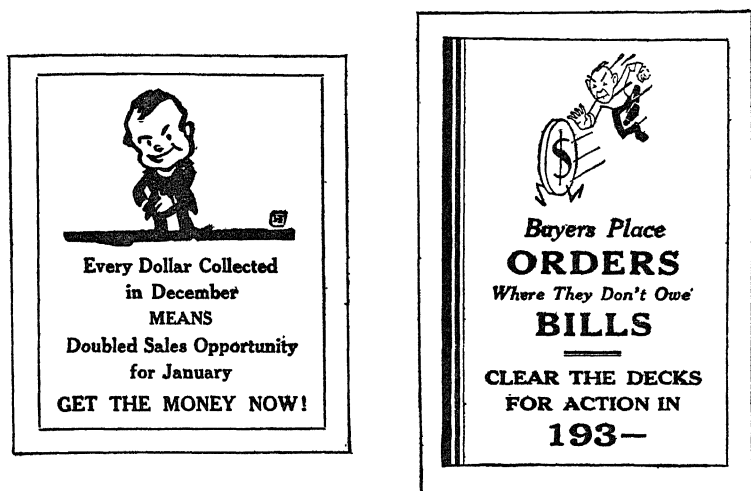


Figure 4. Typical Gummed Stickers

analysis of accounts receivable, showing all accounts that are more than two months overdue, and asks them to concentrate on these lists during the balance of the month.

Appeals to the salesmen are based on the theme of increased business, which insures their willing cooperation. The salesman thinks in terms of selling more goods rather than collecting any money for the credit department. A steady stream of suggestions in the form of gum stickers goes out to them attached to letters from all departments. A supply of these stickers is kept on the desks of the treasurer, sales manager and the advertising manager. Frequent changes of copy keep interest and curiosity alive. However, any special stimulus in collection proce-

ture soon grows stale and must be superseded at once by something new.

**Keeping Salesmen Posted.**—The credit manager of an eastern manufacturer of drugs has solved the problem of sales cooperation in the following way: Each member of the selling organization is impressed with the fact that he is not a bill collector or bad debt chaser. However, through personal contact with the credit department he comes to realize that through closer cooperation there is mutual advantage.

To that end each salesman is advised when the account of one of his customers gets beyond the routine follow-up stage. The usual procedure is for the salesman to refer to the condition of the account in a rather matter of fact way on his next call. He may say, "By the way, Mr. Jones, our Credit Manager asked me if you were still in business." This remark will usually bring about one of two replies. Either "I must mail him a check" or "I'll have a check made out for you to take back." If the latter response is made, the salesman answers, "No, just mail it to him. My work is helping you sell more of our goods, not collecting on accounts." Thus the salesman maintains his position as a marketing specialist, yet the customer knows that his account will be closely followed.

If for any reason a payment on the account cannot be made at that time, the customer can lay the cards on the table before a sympathetic listener who can plead his case before the credit department, and at the same time make recommendations as to the subsequent procedure to be followed. In either case the salesman's relations with the customer are strengthened and the credit department has first hand information regarding the customer's attitude toward the account.



## CHAPTER 12

### THE PSYCHOLOGY OF COLLECTION

**Science Confirms Business Experience.**—The wise credit and collection man, like the wise salesman, has always studied his customers, their habits of living, of buying, of paying, of thinking. He has studied his business also in relation to his customers as to the effect it produces on their habits of living, of buying, of paying, of thinking.

This is the study of collection psychology. Psychology is merely the science of mental operations, that is, the study of the way the mind of the average person works. It has rendered great service to business, because men of trained analytic power have examined a large number of cases and have decided on a number of definite principles. This is precisely the constant practice of the skilled credit or collection man, and for that reason he has welcomed the aid of the scientist. In solving the problem of selecting from many possible steps the most effective one, science has pointed out the power of habit, the importance of securing and holding attention, the value of appeals to instincts and emotions to which nearly all men respond automatically, and the value of suggestion which sets the reader's own imagination to work. The psychologist affirms that in appraising the value of these matters his laboratory tests re-enforce the experience of the business man.

**Appealing to Established Ideas.**—Above all, psychology emphasizes the value of appealing to established ideas. Certain ideas are much more firmly planted in our minds through long custom and use than are others. The merest reference to them will awaken associations and memories that stir us powerfully. The student of sales psychology observes that the interest of most men in their health, in their loved ones, their homes, their success, their desire to make money or to save it, has always

been strong. Their minds are stored with memories of acts they have performed because of these interests. Consequently even a suggestion of these interests moves them strongly towards action. Indeed indirect suggestion may be more effective than open discussion. The latter may arouse opposi-

NECESSARY IN EVERY LETTER	SECURE ATTENTION SECURE ACTION MAINTAIN RESPECT SHOW FAIRNESS EMPLOY SURPRISE AND IMPULSE
DESIRABLE IN EVERY LETTER	RESELL THE CUSTOMER YOUR GOODS, CREDIT OR SERVICE (APPEAL TO SELF- INTEREST) APPEAL TO PRIDE APPEAL TO GOODWILL AND COOPERATION
NECESSARY IN EARLY LETTERS	USE THE POWER OF HABIT
POSSIBLE IN ANY LETTER	APPEAL TO: GOOD NATURE FAIR PLAY DESIRE TO AVOID ANNOYANCE SUCCESS
BACKGROUND OF EARLY LETTERS AND FOREGROUND OF LATER LETTERS	APPEAL TO FEAR
POSSIBLE IN LATER LETTERS	APPEAL TO SHAME
POSSIBLE AT VARIOUS TIMES	APPEAL TO: FAMILY AFFECTION CURIOSITY SAVINGS ACQUISITIVENESS COMPETITION IMITATION PATRIOTISM
AVOID AT ALL TIMES	ANGER PITY CONTEMPT

Figure 5. A Chart of Collection Psychology

tion, while in the case of the former, action may follow without the realization that he has responded to any stimulus outside his own mind. He believes he has acted chiefly on his own initiative, almost unaware that he has been skilfully persuaded to act. In the language of the salesman, he thinks he has "sold himself," instead of "being sold."

Likewise the student of collection psychology learns to appeal to established ideas. He studies, first of all, the mental operation of the man who is asked to pay a bill, to discover the usual trend of his thought so as to work with it rather than against it. Next he studies his customers to see whether there are any other motives on which they are accustomed to act, which he can use in collection. Such a motive as local pride, for instance, may never have entered the customer's mind in connection with his payment, but this does not mean that the collection man cannot make use of it.

**Establishing Impressions of Service.**—Finally he goes over the whole field of the relation between his house and the customer, analyzing it to find the "established ideas," established by every year and every day of their business dealings. He realizes that the established ideas which are of use to him in collection are associated in the customer's mind with the values of goods, service, and credit. And if an honest review of his customer's relations shows him that these values are not well planted as established ideas in the minds of his customers, he determines that he will plant them there by selling credit in good earnest in the future.

The use of collection psychology does not in the least interfere with the writing of "real" letters full of the personal tone. Above all other kinds, the ultra-confidential type of correspondence dealing with credit must have a personal quality. A labored and artificial use of collection appeals either in conversation or letters will never accomplish results.

**Psychology in an Interview.**—Suppose that the credit manager is receiving a call from John Jones of Peoria, who has overbought heavily, has been unable to pay for his invoices, and has in consequence found his orders for new goods cut down by the credit man. In this interview Mr. Jones is going to hear some plain truths about overbuying, and he will be told that the decision of the house is final against shipping the orders in the full dimensions that were put down by the salesman when he visited Peoria. But the credit manager has made up

his mind that he is going to make Jones "feel all right about it" when their little talk is over. He finds out that Jones has been trading with his house for six years, and that his business in that time has amounted to several thousand dollars. Jones is a fine fellow personally and conducts a good store. Also he comes from a good town in a good state. "I shall show him that I like him," thinks the credit manager, "and that we appreciate his business." In other words, he will make liberal use of the appeal to pride. It will be accident insurance too, if Jones happens to be angry.

Jones's mind is fixed on two things: the letter he received telling him his orders could not be shipped, and the money he is going to lose by not having those goods to sell at the right time. So the manager determines to side-track any talk about that letter, if possible, until Jones is in a more friendly mood; and he determines to make Jones see that he will lose more money by overbuying and allowing goods to grow stale on his shelves than he will by ordering less than he really needs and then reordering, provided the state of his account makes re-ordering allowable. In other words, if the credit man can succeed in making Jones believe that he is really interested in the latter's welfare, he will appeal strongly to his self-interest through the money-making instinct. Also the credit man decides that this situation is not going to happen again with Jones if he can help it. He is going to make him understand the position of the house and will remind him, gently but firmly, of the many letters they have exchanged on this subject during the last three years. The problem is how to do this without making Jones "sore."

If the credit man is possessed of the supertact that every man in his position ought to have, he will so manage that interview that Jones will not feel that he has been lectured like a schoolboy and taught his A B C's, or that the credit man is "butting in," and "trying to run his business." Not at all. When the glass door of the office closes behind Mr. Jones, that gentleman will return to Peoria, proud of being taken into the credit man's confidence and of being shown the inner workings of a credit business of great magnitude; proud too,

of being one of a comparatively small number of men, who in the judgment of this experienced merchandiser, are able to appreciate and to apply to the running of their stores the underlying principles of this line of business.

He is perhaps a trifle ashamed of himself, as he sits in the parlor car bound for home, but he is uplifted by a due confidence in himself, and he is thinking over those plans for reducing his stock, which in conference with the sales manager have been worked out to meet his exact problem. And the final thought of Mr. Jones is, "Smith and Company certainly do believe in treating people right."

**What Appeals Were Used?**—This incident, imaginary, but nevertheless typical, shows the credit manager in his rôle of selling credit. He has won success in this case by a study of his customer's psychology, by appealing, above all, to his pride and his self-interest or his desire to make money, by appealing a little to his shame, a little to his sense of fear, a great deal to his goodwill and his sense of fair play; perhaps somewhat also to his local pride. He has concentrated Jones's mind on the desired ideas and has avoided emphasis on any ideas that would conflict with the action he wishes Jones to take. Finally he has made that action easy for Jones and has linked it with a powerful appeal to goodwill by showing him a good way to reduce his stock and his present indebtedness at the same time.

**Psychology in a Retail Credit Interview.**—Or let us examine the use of collection psychology made by a retail merchant in talking with a slow-paying customer coming into the store. "Will you let me have something on account, Mr. Robinson? You know that account of yours has been running along quite a while now, and I really ought to clear my books. We merchants have got to keep our expense of doing business down as low as possible these days, or else we shall have to mark up the prices on our goods. The people we buy from are pressing us harder all the time and we've got to keep them paid up or else we won't be able to get the best class of goods, and to give the kind of service we like to show our customers. I

tell you, running a retail store is pretty much of a science nowadays, and you have to watch every penny.

"Also we are trying to put in improvements all the time to show our appreciation of the good trade we get, and that costs money too. How did you like those new display cases? We've got it figured out now so the customers can come in here and look at the goods themselves without having all sorts of counters in the way. It's more sanitary too, to have these tables, because dirt doesn't collect behind them and there is no place where a lazy clerk may put odds and ends of things away.

"I'll tell you another thing, Mr. Robinson. What I'm afraid of is, that unless I get that account paid up, you'll stop doing business here. I don't want you thinking about the account every time you come into the store. I just want you to think that this is the place where you like to do your buying, because you find the goods you want and the clerks give you attentive service. And if you want to ask about anything or if there are any of our goods that aren't giving satisfaction, I want you to feel like coming and talking it over with me personally and giving me a chance to do the right thing by you. If you could give me ten dollars on account right now and, say, half of the balance of it on the first of the month, and the rest on the first of the next month, we'd get it all cleaned up without giving you any inconvenience. All *right*, Mr. Robinson, thank you, sir." And then he changes the subject.

This typical interview bristles with "appeals to pride and self-interest," and "resells" the customer in such a way as to make him a permanent patron of the store.

**Psychology in Handling "Dead-Beats."**—The merchant, whether wholesaler or retailer, who discovers too late that he has sold goods to some one who comes perilously near to being in the dead-beat class, or the collector or attorney who has to approach a person of this type, is easily persuaded of the value of collection psychology for this particular task. The appeal to fear is the most potent in such cases, but how shall this appeal be managed? The poor-pay customer is not easily fright-

ened. He is either sufficiently callous by nature, or indifferent through experience, to be unmoved by ordinary collection appeals. The collector who can thoroughly understand this type of mind, who can outguess it and surprise it, will be able to score a victory where others have failed. Frankness without bluster; swift and determined advance from stage to stage of the collection procedure; occasional appeals to pride or self-interest while the stern pressure of the appeal to fear is relaxed for the moment; these methods convince the tough-minded delinquent that he has met his master and that to resist payment further will be too expensive.

**Psychology in Letters.**—To utilize these collection appeals in correspondence is no more difficult than to use them in an interview. The letter-writer must judge of the situation, fix his mind on the end to be attained, canvass the means at his disposal for attaining that end, and then write the letter much as he would conduct the interview, except that the letter will be much briefer. (See Figure 5.)

As a matter of fact, the phrases and ideas which have proved successful in collection correspondence have in nearly every case been adapted from personal interviews. Incidentally, it does not pay to make a collection interview long-winded, any more than to write long collection letters.

**The Personality Behind the Appeal.**—It makes a difference who uses the collection appeal. The bookkeeper, for instance, typifies a definite routine and clock-like regularity. He personifies the accuracy back of the ledger record which makes certain that shallow claims of discrepancy will be promptly refuted. He personifies, also, the mechanical advancement of the collection process. If he says, "This account will be handed to the collection department in ten days," or to the credit manager, as the case may be, the delinquent knows that it is useless to attempt to stay that action. A bookkeeper's duties are performed according to the orders of his superior officers, and appeals to him will have no effect. A letter issued by the bookkeeper and signed with the company's name, without the book-

keeper's name, may appeal by suggestion to pride or goodwill, etc. In such cases these letters typify the house in its general, impersonal relation and usually produce a definite effect.

If the credit manager in person signs a letter, the communication then typifies the house in its personal relation with the customer. The manager's greater authority invests with more force any appeal which his letter contains. An appeal to pride made by the bookkeeper, or an attorney, or a collection agency whose only interest is in getting the money, though it has effect, produces less than an appeal from an official of influence and prestige. No man's good opinion of us is contemptible, but the good opinion of the mighty is worth more as an incentive to our actions. An appeal to self-interest, an offer of service or leniency, comes with more force from an officer who has the authority to dispense substantial favors. The salesman, too, has his peculiar value as the source of collection appeals. Above all it must be noticed that all varieties of the resale argument come with infinitely more force from the house itself than from any outside agency of collection.

**The "Tone" of the Appeal—Diplomacy.**—Not only is there a difference in "who makes the appeal" but also in "how it is made." "Young collection men," said an experienced manager, "are almost always too severe in the way they turn a man down or try to collect money. The collection cocktail they compound has too much bitters in it. A skilful dash of the appeal to fear, mixed with a large proportion of appeals to pride and self-interest, makes the right combination in most cases."

A credit manager said to one of his assistants before an interview with a patron from out of town, "I'm going to scare this fellow a little." But the way he did it was a revelation in tact to the assistant. Real sympathy and understanding of the case and genuine desire to be of service, together with a definite knowledge of just how far to go in standing up for the creditor's rights, are necessary if one is to gage successfully the amount of pressure or leniency to be accorded in any individual instance. The heavy-footed, tactless man of dull



perceptions and slow sympathies makes a poor wielder of collection appeals. Clumsy appeals to goodwill may become meaningless flattery, which forfeits the delinquent's respect, encourages him to resist payment, and makes it necessary to use severe methods, which in turn will forfeit his goodwill. The collection man is a diplomat of business, dealing with very delicate matters, and the heavy-footed diplomat is a veritable bull in a china-shop. Here again the advantage lies entirely with the house which makes its own collections, because the usual collector, accustomed to deal chiefly with tough cases, is in most instances a poor diplomat. Of course there is no reason why the outside collector cannot be a skilled and successful handler of collections in the early stages of delinquency. And it is very often true that he has more skill and tact than the collection department of the creditor house, simply because he has made more careful study of collections.

**Methods Useful in Any Business.**—Most collection appeals find their way sooner or later into letters, partly because nine-tenths of all business is done by letters, partly because business men are constantly learning to write better letters. Accordingly, in the following discussion of collection appeals, a very extended analysis has been made of letters and forms of all kinds, as well as of word-of-mouth arguments and appeals used by collection men in every line of business. It would be highly illuminating if it were possible to write down the names of firms and individuals, in every case, who have used the material given herewith. If this record could be presented it would go far to prove the statement that the underlying principles of all business are identical, for in an indefinite number of cases the same method has been employed by firms of entirely different lines of business and with every complexion and shade of collection problems. The difference lay in the procedure of these houses, that is to say, in the stage of the collection program at which they used these various methods and appeals, in the number of letters issued, the general tone and style adopted, and the length of time allowed to elapse before proceeding to severe measures.

In general the research undertaken in the preparation of this book indicates plainly that the most skilful and consistent use of collection appeals is being made by those houses which are endeavoring to educate their customers in living up to the terms laid down and to reduce their overdue outstanding indebtedness without forfeiting the goodwill of their trade.

The moral would seem to be that every collection method should be known to a credit or collection man, because while he may not be able to use it precisely as some one else does, he may be able to change and adapt it to some situation in his own collection problems.

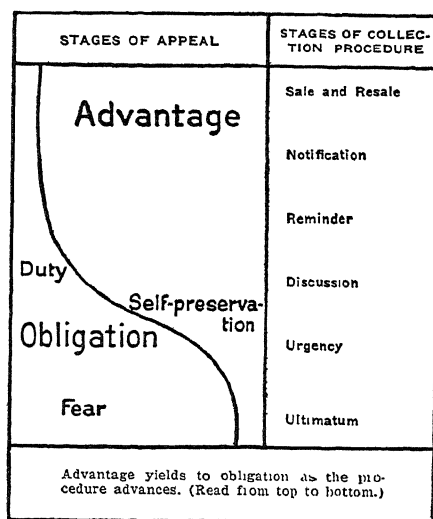


Figure 6. Stages of Collection Appeal and Procedure

**Requisites of a Good Collection Letter.**—Every collection letter should get the *attention* of its readers. It should use the power of *habit*. It should always endeavor to *secure action*.

In all his efforts the collection man should arouse *respect*. He should show *fairness* in every step.

All his appeals to customers are expressed in the two terms, *obligation* and *advantage*. The former lies in the background during the entire collection procedure, becoming more impor-

tant as it goes on, but not omitted even at the beginning; the latter is more important at the beginning, yielding place to obligation towards the end. (See Figure 6.)

In the earliest stages of his procedure, he can appeal to *pride*, either personal, local, or sectional; to *self-interest* through the *resale* of credit or goods; to *savings*, expressed in the desire for discount; and to *goodwill* and *cooperation*.

Appeals which begin to imply a trifle more of duty and a trifle less of advantage are those to *good nature* and the sense of *fairness* or *fair play* in the customer. In a class by itself is the appeal to the *desire to avoid annoyance*, in which duty and advantage are almost equally blended. Then come appeals to *shame* and *fear*; in this connection it is sometimes possible to use *curiosity* and *family affection*. Under certain circumstances appeals can be made to the sense of *honesty*, and to *savings* expressed through the desire to avoid the cost of certain collection methods, or *acquisitiveness* through the desire for some discount or bonus given for closing up an overdue account. The desire for *success* may be appealed to in varying forms at varying stages of the procedure.

Emotions carefully to be avoided are *anger*, which arouses opposition and delays the payment; and *pity*, which destroys the sense of respect and fear, because the person who feels pity has less feeling of duty or obligation to the object of his pity. *Contempt* must be avoided for the same reason.

Through employment of variety, he must use the principle of *surprise* and *impulse*.

**Attention Value.**—Especially in collecting petty accounts or in dealing with careless debtors, attention value is important in the collection procedure. A letter, being more personal, gets more attention than a statement. But there are many ways of giving attention values to the statements or even to the invoice. Explanation of terms in simple language and in type large enough to be easily read, set apart from other printed matter, makes the terms hard to overlook. On a second statement these can be printed in red ink or on a card calling attention to them. A reminder printed at the bottom of the

statement is more easily seen if put in legible type. It can be set "on the bias," or a line drawn around it in blue pencil. Or, the statement may contain a question mark and the credit man's initials in blue pencil. The word "over" in ordinary sized type at the bottom may call attention to a statement of terms on the back or to some printed news item, quotation, epigram, bit of verse, etc., bearing on credits or collection.

The appearance of a letter has much to do with its attention value. Neatness in typing, good margins, a good letterhead, and respectable paper stock entitle the letter to attention. Beginning with a story or with some striking remark or with a phrase that cuts like the lash of a whip are means of preventing the reader's eye from glancing too easily over the page. A question is a better attention-getter than a plain statement. Short sentences, short paragraphs, simple language, make easy reading and so invite attention. Tabulated material, especially if listed one, two, three, etc., attracts attention by reason of a margin wider than the other parts of the letter.

A typewritten letter gets better attention than a printed or multigraphed letter, and consequently it is advisable, if forms are required, to use short forms, each individually typed, or paragraph forms, each individually typed, or to run the letters on the automatic typewriter.

**Personal Reference in Letters.**—One of the very best means of securing attention is to mention toward the beginning of the letter the man's name, some fact about his business, or his orders, that sets the letter apart from the usual run of stereotyped, generalized collection letters. For example, "It was a great pleasure to receive your nice order for . . . . ., but we confess that when we filled it and checked it for shipment we hardly anticipated being obliged to wait more than 60 days, as we have done, for payment after the time it was due," or "You, yourself, Mr. Smith, as treasurer of the X Y Z Corporation, understand the necessity for prompt payments, and I am sure you enforce them in your business." Simple references like these can be put into form letters. In dictated letters the reader's interest will be aroused in proportion as he sees that

the writer is familiar with the details of his personal situation. These personal references usually arouse pride also.

After a short reminder, to use a longer letter is a good means of getting attention, especially if the latter part of this letter contains some striking statement.

The collector, the draft, and the telegram have as their chief value their demand on the debtor's attention. He cannot overlook them. Statements may lie in a scattered heap on his desk, collection letters may be thrown down as soon as he discovers their nature, or even before he has opened the envelope; but no matter how careless or indolent he may be, the telegram finds him out, the draft at least demands some action, and the collector is too big to be thrown into the waste-basket. Probably the amount of fear connected with any of these three methods is not very great, and they serve their chief function as attention-getters.

Varied methods which surprise the debtor because they are out of the ordinary routine have attention value. A collection man who has reason to believe that in any case his letters are being overlooked, or who finds that his early reminders do not bring so high a percentage of replies as they should, may try to get attention by more direct use of some of the appeals discussed in this chapter. He may cast his argument into the form of a story, or he may even try various "stunt" methods such as humorous stories, "freak" circulars, queer letterheads, and so forth.

**The Attention Value of Curiosity.**—A letter beginning with a news item or a story excites the reader's curiosity and is likely to make him finish the letter because he cannot tell precisely what is coming. Aside from this it is doubtful whether curiosity is an instinct of much value to the collector, the appeals sometimes listed under this head belonging rather to some form of the appeal to fear.

**A Typical "Stunt" Letter.**—An ingenious "freak" or "stunt" letter is reproduced in Figure 7. Since the letterhead, as well as the credit manager, is "burnt up," it is extremely unlikely that the recipient would throw the letter into the waste-

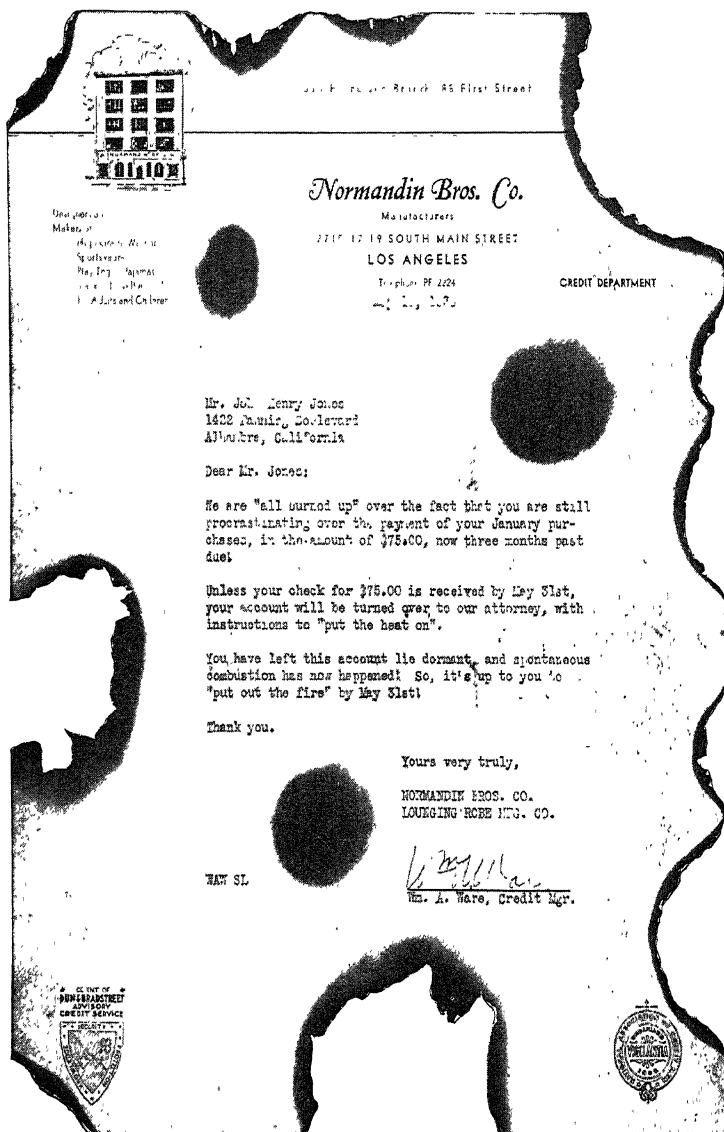


Figure 7. Typical "Stunt" Collection Letter

basket without reading it to the end. This is, of course, precisely the effect that the "stunt" letter is designed to bring about.

**Objection to Freak Letters.**—The objection to freakish methods in collection as in sales is, first, that they attract attention to themselves and not to the action desired; second, they cannot be kept up indefinitely because any one of them soon loses its novelty, and the credit man's invention in thinking up others is soon exhausted. On the other hand, the sound, fundamental reasons for requesting or requiring payments are always serviceable, can always be presented in new and interesting forms, and best of all, they rest on a basis of genuine fact, on the actual relation between buyer and seller. There is serious danger that freakish methods may smack of excuses, as if the creditor were ashamed or afraid to approach the delinquent directly. It cannot be said that such methods should never be used; as soon as any one tries to lay down an absolute rule in any direction, some clever person makes a startling success by breaking that rule in a new and interesting fashion. But stunts are always dangerous and in any but the smallest percentage of cases should be unnecessary.

## CHAPTER 13

### COLLECTION PROCEDURE—EARLY STAGES

**Questions of Procedure.**—What is the best procedure to follow in collection? How far apart should letters be sent? How many statements should be sent before writing letters at all? How long should an account run before being turned over to an outside agency? These are only a few of the questions which confront the credit or collection man in establishing a program for his collection procedure.

**General Advice.**—The general advice of the experienced credit man is, "Give them good treatment if they are worthy, and clear your books of the doubtful cases." That is, maintain the goodwill of those who are deserving of the privilege, but do not spend energy on customers from whom nothing is to be had; put your efforts instead into constructive and paying business. The problem in general is first, how to show good treatment that nevertheless will bring in the money as rapidly as the debtor can possibly pay it, and second, how to devise methods, whether handled inside the office or by an outside collection agency, that will leave the credit man free to put in his time where it will count for most.

Severity in the early stages is to be avoided. "When I was learning the business under our president," says a well-known credit man, "he used to say to me, 'You know how it was when you were catching horses in the pasture. You had a tuft of grass in one hand and a brick in the other. First throw him a tuft of grass and then throw him the brick, but always throw him the tuft of grass first.'"

**Stages of Collection Procedure.**—The collection procedure as indicated in the chart on page 112, has six stages:

Sale and resale  
Notification

Reminder  
Discussion

Urgency  
Ultimatum



Even in advance of these stages there is another period, during which prestige begins to produce its effect.

**The Effect of Prestige.**—Collection begins even before the goods are sold, with the impression made on the future customer's mind by the prestige of the house. It will give protection against dishonest tactics. A famous credit manager says, "When I was a young man in the employ of Marshall Field's wholesale house, they had a reputation of always collecting one hundred cents on the dollar. Whether this reputation was deserved or not, it had a powerful effect, and merchants who were intending to fail and to reopen saw to it that when their books were closed they owed Marshall Field nothing. Otherwise, they believed, they could never buy goods there again."

A common saying descriptive of character is, "He's the kind of man who pays his bills." Another might well be coined, "He is the kind of man who gets his bills paid." The prestige of a great merchandising house runs far in advance of its operations, and customers when buying their first bill of goods from it thoroughly expect to pay.

What is the secret of the marvelous reputation which such houses enjoy? The quality of their goods is high, their financial position is sound, their skill and power as buyers are great, their understanding of merchandising is unparalleled, their determination to get their dues is fixed; but above all these their integrity is unquestioned. The single word "character" sums it up. The man with character has means of securing his rights and one result is that he has less occasion to enforce them. The customer who desires credit accommodation from such a house knows that he must "pay the price."

**The Stage of Sale and Resale.**—If the advertising of a house has an untruthful sound and the values offered therein are questionable, it will be harder to collect payment for the goods sold. If the advertising is too emphatic and induces the purchaser to expect more than can reasonably be had in the merchandise at the price quoted, the resulting dissatisfaction will be felt in harder collections. If a salesman oversells the

customer and loads his shelves with merchandise he cannot dispose of, or offers him inducements that the house will not substantiate, the collection department will feel the effects of these bad sales policies. The insurance company which oversells is punished by lapses, the book company which oversells finds its collection lengthy and expensive and is obliged to take back many of its volumes. "Even in selling for strictly cash," says the manager of publicity for Montgomery Ward & Co., "we take the utmost pains to undersell rather than to oversell in our catalog descriptions lest the purchaser on receiving the goods be dissatisfied and take advantage of our guaranty to return his purchase." The credit and collection managers should have a voice in determining sales and advertising policies.

Resale can be carried on throughout the period of the relation between the customer and the house. The jobber can continually educate the retail merchant in the principles of credit and their mutual advantage in maintaining them. Every opportunity can be taken to increase the satisfaction and profit the purchaser finds in the goods he has bought. Some companies even follow up for a considerable period purchasers who have made a "once-in-a-lifetime" purchase, in order to prevent friction arising over repairs and adjustments, and to increase the goodwill which will make possible sales to the purchaser's friends. An instalment house is losing a marvelous opportunity if it does not conduct a regular resale campaign from the moment the order is taken to the time the final receipt is mailed to the customer; the cost of this would be paid many times over from the expense of collections and lapsed payments. This resale program need not be carried on entirely by direct mail, though this is the medium which comes naturally to mind; an apparently accidental call from a salesman, a letter asking for the names of other possible prospects, or a telephone call, may serve the purpose at small expense. Regular advertising in newspapers and magazines can lay emphasis on the solid benefits enjoyed by a purchaser, and such advertising will tend to keep previous customers thoroughly "sold" on the merits of their investment. This very important aspect of advertising is just beginning to be recognized.

Resale does not come to an end by any means when delinquency begins, but should be carried on with renewed earnestness and ingenuity at the first sign of slowness in payment. Remember that resale does not mean merely reselling the goods, but reminding the customer skilfully of services rendered and of the value to him of sound credit.

**The Stage of Notification.**—Accurate records, like sound credits, are built into the basis of good collecting, and the system of an office must be such that mistakes in accounts are reduced to the minimum, until their habitual accuracy produces its effect on the customer's mind. He is not inclined to claim discrepancies if he is always proved wrong, and he is much more likely to pay on receipt of the statement.

It is worth while for any firm to analyze its accounts in order to ascertain what per cent of its customers pay on receipt of the statement. If this percentage is not decidedly large, then the methods of sale and resale must be subjected to rigid scrutiny and reformation, while a very earnest "clean-up" campaign should be instituted to reform the bad habits of customers.

Some credit men believe that the invoice is sufficient notification and that the customer should pay when the account is due without further warning. Others—and these are probably the majority—always send the statement to arrive on the day when payment is due, believing that the results more than pay for the expense.

Another excellent plan which is adopted by many houses is to send the statement to arrive five or ten days before the account is due. It is a good plan, in order to avoid annoyance, to print or stamp on this statement in large type the words, "This account will not be due for ten days. Statement is submitted for your convenience." Or the same words may be printed on a sticker and pasted to the statement.

In the case of delinquents with whom a special arrangement has been made, it is often wise to send a courteous letter on some pretext reminding the customer of his coming obligation and urging him not to be found wanting. On the other hand,

several instalment companies handling small payments have found it advisable to allow the customer to do his own reminding, and send him at the time of sale a card on which he is to keep his own record, urging him to establish a definite day in each month on which to make payments.

**The Stage of Reminder.**—The first assumption, if payment is not received when due, is that an oversight has occurred due to press of business or other reasons, and the collector tries to reinstate the regular order of things by a gentle reminder. Depending upon the classification of customers as good pay, slow pay, or poor pay, or on some other classification, he may send out one or two statements at intervals followed by very simple letters.

Here in most instances is the all-important crisis in the history of an account. If the customer does not pay on the first or second reminder, he is in grave danger of lapsing still further, because it has become habitual with him not to pay this particular account. He has thought of it several times but has refrained from action. How is the collection man to prevent this state of mind? The answer is, by using some means *at this point* which will call the matter more definitely to the customer's mind. When these means have been decided on, one of the worst leaks in the collection procedure will have been plugged.

The step adopted must not give offense and it must not be used with the wrong people. Consequently it must be impersonal and courteous, and it must be based on a careful classification of customers, for those who are seldom slow do not need the same treatment as those who frequently run beyond the terms laid down, while those who are poor pay may receive even more urgent communications.

**Stickers and Rubber Stamps.**—Special stickers attached to the second statement, phrases imprinted with a rubber stamp, enclosures dealing with credit and sent with the second statement or the first letter, printed form letters accompanying the second statement—these are some of the many means adopted

for this purpose. Typewritten reminders may be substituted for printed or multigraphed reminders, and specific appeals to pride and goodwill may be employed to make these letters sound less mechanical. A paragraph of sales material in the letter or some other method of "reselling the house" is an admirable means of removing unpleasant implications from this increased urgency and of reminding the customer that he should "pay the price" for his valuable credit privilege.

If any such means are adopted every care must be taken to let the customer see that they are general and not applied to him alone, and the house must be ready to explain—in fact, it can prepare form letters for this purpose—that these methods are adopted merely as being more businesslike. "We can assure you," this letter may say, "that we earnestly desire to retain your goodwill and to increase the volume of our dealings as well as the efficiency of the service we are able to render you, and we are confident that you will benefit equally with ourselves by every improvement in our office practice."

The rubber stamp reminder always implies extra urgency, partly by reason of its color. But a monotonous repetition of "Please remit" presently loses force. One collection man, realizing this, uses from time to time six different stamps. One of them shows the "man in the moon" with an alluring smile, and the word "Please" written above it. Another shows within an oval border a big question mark "Have you forgotten us?" Another is a hand with a finger pointing and the words, "Past due." Two others somewhat longer read, "Statement of June purchases and balance open on our ledger for purchases prior thereto. Please verify and report any error on this statement"—"You have evidently overlooked payment of last month's bill. Please mail check, which we are sure you have forgotten."

One advantage of printed stickers over rubber stamps is their comparative novelty, and the fact that their language can be more courteous and explanatory. The color of these stickers can be made subdued or violent to fit their particular mission.

**Special Forms.**—A card distributed by the National Association of Credit Men, when enclosed with a statement or letter, brings earnestly to the delinquent's attention the consequence of his neglected correspondence. This card is shown in Figure 8. It provides a courteous, impersonal reminder. It resells credit and appeals to self-interest and pride.

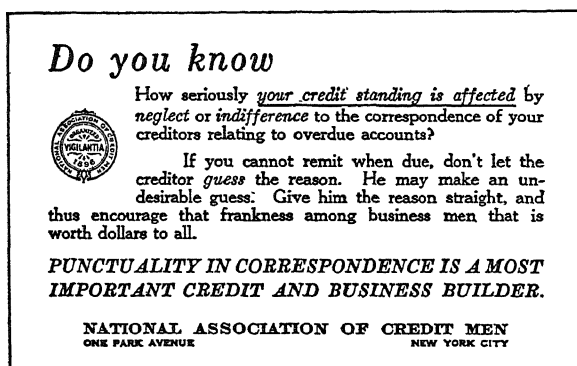


Figure 8. N. A. C. M. "Envelope Stuffer"

Novel forms of coin cards, etc., are sometimes used as an urgent means of attracting attention and as an easy way of getting action. The Scott Paper Company, for example, uses a sheet about 5 x 14 with a gummed tab at each end. This is folded into a 4½ x 3¼ size, the customer's name and address typed on the outside, and one tab fastened down. When the customer receives this and opens it he finds a duplicate invoice folded up inside. On one-half of the sheet itself is printed a letter, a reproduction of which will be found on page 125.

In one corner of the space reserved for the letter is also shown a copy of the statement of the customer's account in three columns, one for the date, one for the debit item, and one for the credit item, with the balance shown at the bottom of the sheet.

Dear Sir:

May we thank you for your recent purchases of Scott Tissue Products? Particularly the ones we have listed in the statement form opposite.

Is there any reason why this account has remained unpaid slightly longer than the contract terms, "30 days net cash" permit, gentlemen? Instant attention will be accorded your explanation in such an event.

Your message can be written in the blank space attached or your check for \$ . . . can be wrapped in this form which refolds for your convenience into an addressed return envelope.

A response in either form is respectfully requested before the close of the week and will be gratefully received.

Very truly yours,

CREDIT DEPARTMENT

The other half of the sheet is headed by a date line, the address "The Scott Paper Company," and the salutation, "Gentlemen:." At the bottom of the sheet is printed, "Very truly yours." Even where the customer would prefer to disregard the sheet sent him and dictate his own letter the device is likely to bring quicker action than if the blank sheet were omitted.

**Personal Letters.**—If collections are to be effective during the reminder stage, the letters must not be hackneyed and stereotyped. Especially if forms are used, these must be provided in considerable number and changed frequently.

The use of individually typed letters instead of multigraphed or printed forms in this stage of collection will usually bring the best results in handling the ordinary mercantile trade and in dealing with customers whose future trade is desired. These letters may use the courteous personal language of dictated correspondence, while the dictator to save expense can indicate them by number, and have them either individually typed from a form-letter book in the possession of the typist or run off on the automatic typewriter. Short reminders are not expensive to type. The dates of previous letters, the amounts involved, or a personal item concerning the customer—even a specially dictated paragraph—are easily inserted in the letter, when sent to the typist together with the number of the form letter.

**Early Stage Letters.**—Brief and effective are the following early period letters:

*(Ten days after due date)*

Dear Sir:

Due- \$. . . . .

Have you overlooked payment of the above amount? According to our terms of net 30 days, it is due for payment.

You will oblige us very much if you will remit by return mail, or reply promptly in case there is some reason why you will be unable to comply with this request.

Yours very truly,

---

*(Twenty days after due date)*

Dear Sir:

Due- \$. . . . .

This item has been called to your attention by statement, but payment has not been received.

Was our former notice overlooked?

Surely it is not your desire for your account to show as delinquent. Therefore, won't you give it your attention?

Yours truly,

---

*(Thirty days after due date)*

Dear Sir:

It has become necessary for us to direct your attention again to your account in the amount of \$. . . . . which still remains unpaid.

Let us remind you that we are able to maintain the standard of low prices at which our merchandise is offered only through the basic principle of thirty day terms.

Our letters to you are certainly due the courtesy of a response, and we anticipate your answer and expect your remittance promptly.

Very truly yours,



## CHAPTER 14

### COLLECTION PROCEDURE—DISCUSSION

**What Is Meant by "Discussion."**—Between the "reminder" and the "urgency" stages of the procedure comes a period which gives the credit manager a real opportunity for constructive collection work. This is called the "discussion" stage because it is essentially a period of give-and-take between creditor and debtor.

This is a fencing bout, with thrusts and counter-thrusts, and frequent feinting on the part of both participants. The exchange of arguments and rebuttals may be face-to-face, or by letter, telephone or telegraph. Frequently it uses all of these media of communication. But the essence of the discussion phase of collection procedure is a meeting of minds—one mind set on the collection of money owed and the other just as firmly set on postponing payment, if not escaping it completely.

**"What Is the Trouble?"**—If the creditor's reminders have been ineffectual in getting the debtor to pay through force of habit, the creditor may next inquire, "What's the trouble?" In the case of petty accounts or previous delinquents or other cases calling for urgency, he may decide to resort at once to drafts or other outside means.

But it is desirable that if he advances at once to the stage of urgency, he should nevertheless explain his severity. Without this precaution many debtors will feel that they are being treated unfairly. In every walk of life and every kind of human relation, after a man has been reminded of his obligation, it is only natural to try to come to an understanding. Many customers may respond to severity used without explanation, just as many horses have patiently become used to bad driving and jerking on the lines; nevertheless, that is not the right way to drive a horse.

If a draft is to be used, the customer can be warned and given an opportunity to reply. The letter can contain a sentence like the following, "We regret to take this step, feeling that you would prefer us to adopt other means, but the necessity of maintaining our terms as the foundation of good business requires us to adopt measures which we believe your own good business judgment will approve." The creditor may use other appeals to explain this; but he must never apologize for it.

We will suppose, however, that the account is fairly large or the customer in fair standing, or that the finances of the creditor permit the debtor an opportunity for explanation. A great number of houses the country over have discovered that urgency at this stage does not pay, that their drafts are returned, while the heavy turnover of trade year by year shows that some policy of the house is driving away established customers—possibly the collection policy. In the words of the general manager of a well-known wholesaler, "My assistants don't seem to realize, when they tell a merchant that they must have his check for \$5,000 on a certain date, that he couldn't get that amount to save his life—not unless he went out and robbed somebody." In order to secure action, one must either make possible the action asked, or else ask for an action that is possible. Probably the account at this stage has been turned over to the credit manager or some higher official whose duty it is to exercise judgment in such instances. By using one of a hundred means he can work for a reply, asking for an explanation accompanied by check, or an explanation letting him know precisely what to expect. Here is the opportunity for real skill in collection.

**Sizing Up the Customer.**—With a record of the account before him, giving a history of the customer's present and past transactions—with a folder of credit information gathered from the salesman, from the customer direct, from rating agencies, and from many other possible sources, the credit manager proceeds to "size up" the customer, and to take the step adapted, in his judgment, to produce the money without forfeiting goodwill or forcing the customer into bankruptcy.

He may be a jobber in St. Louis writing to a customer in Kansas. At his elbow are the latest reports showing conditions of crop, market, and weather, besides a digest and analysis of the comprehensive information collected by his salesmen, East, West, North, and South. Before his mind's eye stretch the wide, treeless plains of Kansas, and he knows this district is suffering from a drought. What is the use of crowding that merchant when the chances are a thousand to one that the farmers have no money and the merchants cannot collect? A friendly letter hinting at a possible arrangement, or offering outright a scheme of part payment, will be the method he adopts. "Mr. Homer is just in from your territory," dictates the manager, "and on the basis of his report, we do not doubt that you are suffering from the prevailing crop and weather conditions in your territory. Nevertheless let me say as one business man speaking to another that we cannot be expected to make arrangements that will reduce your indebtedness unless we know directly from you what the situation is. Please paste the enclosed sticker at the head of your letter and then it will come directly to my desk."

**"Raining in Southern Illinois."**—"One of the young men in my office hasn't enough imagination or sympathy. He writes down a severe letter to a merchant who hasn't answered his reminders and he gets back an indignant reply saying that it has been raining in Southern Illinois, the roads are flooded, business is bad, people can't come into town, and he simply hasn't the money to pay. The trouble with my assistant," concluded the manager who made this observation, "is that he ought to know that it is raining in Southern Illinois."

**Studying the Ledger.**—"I spread out the ledger before me and note the customer's line of business," said another credit manager. "I am a great believer, too, in really personal information; by that I mean notes from the salesman on the customer's build, the color of his hair, the way he shakes hands, and the looks of his store window. Wherever possible, I have a photograph that shows me these things. Many of them are

clipped from our house organs and have served a double purpose in awakening the customer's pride, helping to increase goodwill, and giving me as credit manager the chance to talk to him in a friendly, straight-from-the-shoulder fashion.

"Purchasers in a certain line of business," said this manager, "are always slow because their accounts are in bad shape," and he makes earnest constructive suggestions that show them where their advantage lies. Such correspondence, continued over a number of years, has had wonderful effect in both holding his customers and increasing their prosperity.

**A Basis of Personal Acquaintance.**—"Some use the commercial agencies exclusively, but we go more by business references and the actual signed statement of the customer himself," said the credit manager of a corporation doing a \$30,000,000 business each year. "Unless we know the applicant personally, we depend chiefly on his own statement. Up to July of this year I have used only 80 reports.

"From the form sent in, I find out with whom the merchant does business and how he stands in the community. Is he doing business not warranted by his capital? Has he been 'slow'? Has he asked for extension in the past, or given notes? Here is the record, for instance, of a man who will not answer a letter. I shall send him reminders, using various appeals, until I strike the one that gets the money. He never writes, but is gradually getting to be less slow in his payments. This memorandum tells me of another man who allowed his note to be protested. Nevertheless I knew he was good for the amount and I wrote him a kind letter that made him our friend for life besides getting us the money.

"Our customers are recorded as 60-day men or 90-day men; that is, they pay in that time. I gage my letters to them accordingly. Is it a first offense? What is the merchant's line of business? Perhaps he is stocking up with furniture for the fall. He is consequently under heavy expense, and I offer him part payment. If it is a habitual offense and a large account, I send him sharp letters. But on the average account, I write an educational letter showing that our cost and con-

sequently our prices are based on prompt payment." It may be said in passing that this line of business, owing to the rapid spoilage of goods, necessitates very strict maintenance of its 60-day terms; nevertheless, resale policies are the foundation of its methods.

**The "Branch House" Credit Manager.**—"When I was handling credit in the old A B C company," said the credit manager of one of America's largest corporations, "a personal knowledge of the customers was one of my greatest assets. I took pains in my letters to show personal knowledge and information about conditions in that territory which my local acquaintance gave me. Later, when that company was taken into this corporation, I passed on the same policies to my branch managers. That's what a branch house is for—to get into such close touch with the customers as to know the conditions of climate or business in their locality. I give the branch managers a pretty free hand because I want them to develop initiative and to hand me back their ideas. They get credit for them, too; if the office boy has ideas I haven't, I am glad of it. It is true, I let them have copies of my typical letters and my procedure, and they in turn send me back copies of their reports and their letters; but it is their initiative and their knowledge of local conditions on which we must place reliance. I believe in the credit department showing a warm friendly spirit to customers whether in person or by letter.

"One of our dealers was a queer, timid, old fellow and as deaf as a post. His account was always behind, but he liked our office manager and had confidence in him, so that when he came down to New York, he would hunt him up and take him out to lunch and pay his account. One day a new man in our office wrote him a sharp letter; he wrote back to me saying that if this were the way we were going to treat him he would stop doing business with us. This was a very extreme case, but nevertheless every customer is different from every other customer, and personal acquaintance and attention should be used in handling their accounts."

**Friendly, Earnest Discussion.**—In addition to the letters shown in other chapters which may be used at this stage of the procedure, the following letters illustrate how the credit or collection manager may enter into a friendly, earnest discussion with his delinquent customer, getting attention by the length of his letter, as well as by its serious style.

The first letter makes an appeal to fair play by telling a story of the treatment which any right-minded man would condemn and then turning on the reader with the exclamation, "You are the man!"

Dear Mr. Smith:

Just for a minute, imagine that you are sitting near my desk, and I am telling you a story. Here it is:

A customer—we'll call him "Mr. X,"—bought goods of us on our usual terms. We gave him prompt delivery, and he made no complaint concerning either the quality or the price of the merchandise, but when the bill was due he neither paid it nor made any reply to our statements or letters. Something was wrong, and we cannot see that the fault was ours.

If you had such a customer, what would you do? We are keenly interested in your reply to this question, because "Mr. X" is really Mr. Smith.

We still believe that you are for fair play. Won't you prove it by sending check for \$77.50 at once, so that we may clear your account, and leave the way open for further dealings that will be profitable to both of us?

We shall expect your reaction to the story, in the form of a remittance, by next Monday's mail.

Sincerely yours,

**A Suggestive Letter.**—A manufacturer had a distant customer concerning whom his information was slight. After his usual series of statements and reminders had been issued without getting a reply, he sent the following letter, which gets attention by its unusual "layout," while the sentence so strikingly emphasized contains an unpleasant suggestion for the debtor.

Dear Sir:

You are one of our new customers and this is our first credit relation with you. Our three statements, and our letter of January 1 and 10, have as yet been unanswered. This would indicate that something is wrong.

Did we not come to a satisfactory credit understanding?  
Have we made some mistake on our charge?

---

How do you wish us to handle your account?

---

By all means be frank in telling us if any mistake has occurred, for you will find us more than willing to correct it.

Yours very truly,

**Three Letters in Series.**—A silk manufacturer had obtained a wide distribution through an improved spool cabinet which appealed to retailers, but he often found himself lacking in credit acquaintance with the customer. Accordingly he adopted a policy of following his first statement with a series of three letters which were unusually successful.

Dear Sir:

You have no doubt overlooked the statement we sent you on January 10, for \$25.50, the price of our cabinet with the standard assortment of spool silk.

Will you not make a very special effort to send us a check as soon as you can? We always wish to be as lenient with our customers as we can, but as a business man yourself you can readily perceive the necessity in our line of business, of observing certain definite rules in the matter of payment. We are able to make a free trial offer and to extend valuable services to our customers, only as long as our present financial status continues. If we were not to insist upon the strict observance of this policy, we could not do business upon our present basis of high service to our customers.

We are sure that this policy benefits our customers, not only in the matter of improved service, but as the result of a careful and systematic method of handling accounts. For instance, you know that you, yourself, would rather trade where you knew that your accounts had been regularly and systematically paid; you would have got the "habit" and you would find yourself relieved of the bother and worry of getting off payments at irregular intervals. We have at heart the interests of our customers and this fact compels us to adhere to a systematic method of handling accounts.

We are very pleased to learn that your cabinet has proved satisfactory and trust that we shall soon be able to supply more spool silk for it.

Very truly yours,

Dear Sir:

Unfortunately we have received no reply from you to our letter of January 24, requesting the remittance of an overdue item of \$25.50.

We would appreciate it very much if you would write us out a check and send it in the next mail. No doubt your clerks have overlooked this matter, but as our policy of payment was mailed along with the bill of sale, and as we have since explained the advantages of a systematic method of handling accounts, we are sure that you will be glad to have us bring the matter to your attention again.

If you are encountering any difficulties that make it impossible for you to remit promptly at this time, we would urge you to explain the exact situation to us. Come to a full and open understanding with us. We assure you that our interests and the interests of our customers are the same; our attitude is one of service.

Will you not show your goodwill by mailing that check?

Very truly yours,

---

Dear Sir:

As we have not heard from you in response to our letters of January 24 and January 31, asking for a remittance of your account of \$25.50, we must now ask you to send us a check before February 20.

We have endeavored to explain to you the necessity of a systematic policy of payment on the part of our customers. We regret that we can only infer from your silence that you do not care to acquiesce in our requests—reasonable as we have shown them to be. We shall now be compelled to draw on you through the First National Bank of . . . . ., in case your check does not arrive on February 20.

We hope that you will not make this step an actual necessity.

Very truly yours,

**Two Lumber Letters.**—A lumber manufacturer found that his customers, proprietors of retail lumber yards, were good fellows personally but poor business men. As a part of his campaign to educate them in better dealings and consequently to improve profits for themselves, he prepared the two following letters which base their appeal on mutual pride in the lumber business.



Gentlemen:

We are sorry to find that your bill of \$810 due March 1 is still unpaid. Since we have received no comment on the statements enclosed in our letter of April 2, we assume that the amount is correct, and we are therefore unable to account for this delay of another month.

Situated as we are, a thousand miles apart, it is hard for each of us to realize that the other is a company of hard-working, practical business men, both interested in pushing the lumber trade by conducting our business on a prompt and efficient basis.

If we could get this idea, if we could establish the personal element in our relations, it would mean much to both of us.

Let us keep this thought in mind and really feel that our obligations to our fellow lumbermen a thousand miles away are just as important as those which we owe in our own town.

Take a few minutes and write to us. It will help us to get better acquainted, and remember, it all helps the lumber business.

We enclose another statement. Will you please check it with the invoice and forward the amount promptly?

Very truly yours,

---

Gentlemen:

Two weeks ago we wrote you a letter enclosing a statement of your account amounting to \$810 due March 1, three months ago. We asked you to write us a letter. We wanted to get acquainted with you.

The letter didn't come, neither did the \$810. Frankly, we were disappointed. We thought that we deserved both. We sent a fine carload of lumber. We sent our statement promptly, and we wrote a letter trying to find out what the trouble was when the money didn't come.

All of this brought no results. We like to deal with lumber retailers because they treat us as fellow lumbermen.

You, as the leading retailer of Neilsville, are in a position to boost the lumber business or hold it down by your business methods.

Set them at a level that you will be proud of as a lumberman.

There is no uncertainty or question about this obligation of \$810. It is a single invoice which we are sure you found correct, and we therefore expect that you will write to us promptly enclosing the amount.

Very truly yours,

**An Unusual Letter.**—The following letter by reason of its unusual style and its appeal to pride and fair play produced

good results when employed by a certain manufacturer to bring in the money from a list of habitually careless retailers.

Dear Sir:

We appreciate the fact that you stand in a rather enviable position. Your credit is good, and our protests against your neglecting to pay our small bill of \$25.60 after receiving several reminders cannot, you believe, affect your business standing. However that may be, it is embarrassing and troublesome for us to have to remind you of a bill that you are really able to meet at any time.

In your own business it doesn't exactly pay to go after the man who owes you a few dollars. Neither does it pay us to do so.

You know that your bills against your customers represent transactions entered into in good faith. You are right in your belief that these men are in duty bound to pay you or at least to offer an explanation. Wherein is our case different from your own?

It is our object to take care of your future orders as it is our object to establish better credit relations with you.

Our wish is that our business interests may bring us together in the near future.

Yours truly,

**Seasonal Letters.**—On accounts that have slowed up during the quiet summer months the return-from-vacation theme may be used to advantage. The credit department of the McKinney Manufacturing Company of Pittsburgh has developed several admirable letters of this type. One begins by referring to a trip down the St. Lawrence; another recalls the pleasures of hunting; a third describes a cruise through Long Island Sound and up the Hudson. The collection tie-up in the St. Lawrence letter is very effective. The key paragraph is:

The Rapids of the St. Lawrence are swift, and to some extent dangerous. There are only two of the larger boats that are able to navigate them. No boat makes the return through the Rapids. A canal has been constructed for that purpose. The boat shoots the Rapids and arrives in Montreal nine hours after entering the top Rapids. The boat on the return trip through the canal carries no passengers and requires eighteen hours to cover the same distance. Just compare these two. The down boat carries the pay load, all profit being made on it. The up boat takes twice as long and makes no profit for the line. Compare these two boats with your customers. It's pretty easy to pick out the ones that are carrying the others along, isn't it? We have the same problem.

## CHAPTER 15

### COLLECTION PROCEDURE—URGENT

**Various Methods of Credit Manager.**—Enough has been said in the preceding sections to show the general attitude of the credit manager or higher official who has in charge correspondence with a customer who has failed to reply to reminders. If the customer fails to take the opportunity given him for sending in a reply, or if for other reasons more urgent means must be adopted, the manager still has several options. He will probably try the effect of a draft; he may give warning that an attorney or some other outside agency may be employed; he may endeavor to secure, through a salesman or a traveling credit representative, some personal information about the customer's affairs that will lead to an adjustment; or he may try various combinations of appeals to advantage and obligation with strong emphasis on the resale point of view. When once a reply has been received, he can proceed on the basis of the information it contains.

**Making Drafts Effective.**—While a draft is a good "attention-getter," it is often handled so carelessly as practically to destroy its efficiency. In some localities it is said that drafts have become so common as almost never to receive attention. In Canada, it is common practice to follow one draft by another, almost as in the United States one collection letter is followed by another.

To make the draft effective, then, it should be accompanied or preceded by a letter to heighten its effect in the customer's mind. Some business men are greatly offended by a draft; others never pay except when drawn on; and still others give trumped-up excuses for dishonoring them.

"We are very reluctant to take such measures or even to mention them," writes one credit manager. "We certainly

do not wish to take such a step without giving you an opportunity to respond, and accordingly we shall withhold the draft until April 10, at which time it will be sent you through. . . .” Another company uses a powerful letter urging the delinquent to “pay this draft,” reasoning that, as the draft in itself secures attention and does not arouse much fear, the letter should increase the effect upon the customer’s attention. At the same time the letter contains an appeal to the customer’s fair play and pride in the suggestion that by honoring the draft he will show his preference for friendly dealings.

Another method is to explain courteously why the draft is issued and what are the credit requirements which demand settlement within a certain time, with an expression of regret, because “we are well aware that business men in many instances do not like drafts.” Such a letter should be used, say ten days in advance, as an evidence of fairness.

The following letter was used by a manufacturer with slow- and poor-pay customers, or those who habitually paid only when drawn upon.

Gentlemen:

Evidently our letter of June 14, wherein we requested a remittance covering a past-due account has been overlooked. It happens sometimes with the best of us.

Under the circumstances will you make settlement direct or honor a draft six days hence through the First National Bank?

Unless your check is received we take it for granted that we have your permission to draw and that draft will be accepted.

Yours respectfully,

COLLECTION DEPARTMENT

**An Objection to Drafts.**—A certain large jobber uses drafts less than formerly, having found errors in many of them because of clerical mistakes. Sometimes these mistakes originated in the house, but more frequently they were the customer’s fault. For example, a small storekeeper who was in partnership with another man, would have the habit of signing his own name to checks. The draft would accordingly be made against him, though it should have been made against

the partnership. Or a man doing business in one town might send in his check while he was in another town, with nothing to indicate his real location. This then would be entered to the credit of his name but in another location, possibly in the belief that it was a cash payment from a new account. Mistakes of this sort would be less likely to happen if this house did not do business with such an enormous number of customers, the great majority being small storekeepers, some of whom are unacquainted with business customs.

**When a Draft Is Refused.**—If a draft is refused and a reason assigned, the creditor can write letters which force the debtor either to pay or to take the position of deliberately withholding payment. In the latter case another draft may be sent with notice that following refusal the account will go to attorney; or warning of the attorney may be given without recourse to another draft.

The following letters represent the correspondence which may follow the refusal of draft.

Gentlemen:

A very small sum is owing to us for goods you purchased last year, amounting to \$9.60.

We have written you several times suggesting that you make payment and recently sent you a draft, after giving you ten days' notice of our intention to do so. The draft has just been returned with the curt remark that it was refused.

Under the circumstances we begin to feel that you are purposely neglecting this matter.

Please give attention to this request for payment now in order that the matter may be closed.

Yours very truly,

.....  
CREDIT MANAGER

The following letters are designed to put the delinquent in a position that he cannot defend, so that he must either settle or brand himself as bad pay. Similar letters can be prepared to fit any of the excuses which may be given by a debtor:

Gentlemen:

As we did not receive payment from you according to our regular terms, we drew on you on July 15 for \$102.75. Your bank has returned the draft with a memorandum to the effect that you dispute the amount.

Our books clearly indicate that \$102.75 is the exact amount due. May we ask you to inform us immediately about your understanding of the situation?

Very truly yours,

---

Gentlemen:

Your bank has returned our draft of July 15 for \$102.75 giving no reason for non-acceptance.

As we followed your instructions carefully in filling this order, will you please give us, at your earliest convenience, the basis of your refusal to honor the draft?

Very truly yours,

---

Gentlemen:

Our draft of July 15 in the amount of \$102.75 has been returned by your bank, with the notation "Amount incorrect."

We have checked the account carefully, and \$102.75 appears to be the correct amount. If your records do not agree, may we ask you to let us know at once how they differ from ours?

Very truly yours,

---

Gentlemen:

We have received notice from your bank that you refused to honor our draft of July 15 for \$102.75 on the ground that you had remitted the amount to us direct, by check.

We assure you that we did not receive the remittance. May we ask you to trace it and write us again as soon as possible? We shall appreciate the courtesy very much.

Very truly yours,

---

Gentlemen:

Our recent draft has been returned by your bank with a notation on the back to the effect that they do not wish to present it until we advance the charges.

Our ledger records show that you have been previously notified of this indebtedness which is past due and we do not feel that we should be asked to incur any expense in collection of the amount.

We trust that the matter may be arranged so that prompt shipment can be made. Should there be any reason why we have not heard from you we will appreciate particulars.

Very truly yours,

**A Good Method of Sending Drafts.**—A very thorough procedure has been worked out by A. M. Brooke, president of White Swan Spices and Cereals, Ltd., of Toronto, Canada, to insure that drafts are given proper attention by members of his own organization, by the banks issuing them, and by the drawees. Banks frequently send out inexperienced young men who are easily put off by the drawee with a flimsy excuse. To meet this situation, a slip of instructions to the banker is pasted to the front of every draft, showing seven of the commonest excuses and giving the bank definite directions for action in case any one of these is offered by the drawee. This form is illustrated in Figure 9.

Every bank with which the company deals has also received a copy of the following "Instructions to Collection Clerk."

#### INSTRUCTIONS TO COLLECTION CLERK

The Collection Clerk should understand that a draft is more than a mere "scrap of paper." It is just as much real money to the customer as a \$5 bank note is in that they both have a certain face value. Neither one is of intrinsic value excepting when turned into gold.

In the process of turning a customer's paper into cash the bank has every right to exercise scrupulous care in completing the negotiations, and the simple fact should be kept in mind that when one party draws on another the assumption is that the drawee owes the money.

Rather than to return a draft with some indefinite reason, it would be better, in the case of a disputed amount, to accept a payment on account, advising the drawee that the drawer will be required to make whatever adjustment may be necessary. That is, provided that it is the drawer's error. Point out to the drawee that it is not possible for a bank to discharge on behalf of the drawer any debt that may be owed by the drawee. No matter what the banker may do, the relation between the drawer and the drawee remains the same, and if the drawee were to pay the drawer more than is owed, he could recover by having recourse to law. In other words, it simply means that if A owes B a certain sum of money and it is collectible by law there is nothing that C could do when merely acting in the capacity of an agent that would discharge the debt; excepting, of course, when A paid to C as agent and received a receipt for the full amount of his debt.

Many retail customers of large manufacturers and wholesalers, appreciating how easy it is to let a draft go back by simply not paying any





attention to it, take advantage of this situation. Beside keeping the manufacturer out of his money, this practice causes endless and needless annoyance. When the drawee gives a reason for refusal, for instance, "Writing"—let him write the reason on the back of the draft and sign it.

When he says, "Amount not correct"—ask him to pay the correct amount.

**A Common Cause of Complaint.**—Banks can hardly be blamed for carelessness in handling drafts if no fee accompanies them. A wise precaution is to send a fee with the letter asking the bank to exercise all care in presentation, referring to the fee and offering to send an additional fee if the practice of the bank requires it.

Various letters relating to the use of drafts are shown in the following chapters.

**The "General Manager's" Letter.**—After having taken all reasonable steps without results, many houses are in the habit of allowing an additional time to elapse before turning the account over to an outside collector. In a great number of instances it has been found advisable to utilize this period by making another appeal of a different kind from some higher official of the house. The following letter is an example of this.

Dear Sir:

The credit department has just laid on my desk the folder of your correspondence with the recommendation that we send your account of \$ . . . . to our attorney for collection.

You cannot blame them for their attitude, because there has been no response to their several letters, regarding your account. However, I cannot bring myself to take any drastic action without writing you personally. I really believe that it is an oversight, and that you will take care of this item at once.

I am sure that you will answer me promptly, and I am going to place your folder on my desk, awaiting your reply and remittance. Please do not fail me, as I am doing this against the advice of our credit department.

Yours very truly,

.....  
GENERAL MANAGER

The company issuing this letter sells vacuum cleaners direct to dealers. "It has produced better results than any other in our experience," writes the president. It is of course an adaptation in principle of the "discussion" letter from the credit manager.

**Warning of Legal Action.**—A hardware jobber in the Middle West, when he intends to transfer an account to a local attorney, first sends the customer a letter giving warning of draft which, if ignored, is to be followed by attorney's action:

Dear Sir:

According to our bookkeeper's report, the past-due bills in your account amount to \$. . . . . and as the invoices of . . . . are still unpaid, we are at a loss to understand why our several urgent letters asking for a settlement seem to have been altogether ignored. If you realize that you have not yet paid for goods sold to you on 60-day terms more than . . . . . months ago we think you will concede our treatment of your account has been exceedingly considerate and that we are entitled to be paid without further delay, expense, or annoyance. We shall be greatly obliged if you will promptly forward a remittance of \$. . . . .

Should you make no response to this letter we shall be forced to the conclusion that more effective measures must be adopted to gain this long overdue settlement and accordingly on . . . . your remittance not having been received, we shall draw upon you through a bank in . . . . . for the above mentioned amount and the bank will be directed to place the claim in the hands of our local attorney for prompt action in the event the draft is not paid on presentation. We are reluctant to adopt such severe measures or even to mention them but cannot grant a further extension and must find some means of making the collection. After the accommodation you have had from us we hope you will not put us to the annoyance and expense of collecting from you in this manner.

Yours very truly,

Failing to hear from this, he sends a copy of the letter shown below to the customer's bank, accompanying it with a letter from the house attorney to be handed, in case of the customer's failure to honor the draft, to an attorney named therein.

Gentlemen:

Our sight draft for \$. . . . . representing goods sold on 60-day terms in . . . . . and . . . . . to . . . . . of . . . . ., together with interest on the amount is enclosed. Their mercantile ratings are very good and we utterly fail to understand why no response to our several letters urgently asking for a settlement has been made. Quite likely it is a case of carelessness and we wish you would kindly use your best efforts to collect this item. If you succeed in collecting before the end of this month, charge us with a commission of . . . . . per cent for your trouble.

If you are unable to collect by . . . . . kindly hand or mail the draft, together with this letter, to attorney . . . . . of . . . . . who will understand that we take his name from the Attorney's National Clearing House list and that we wish him to adopt promptly such measures as may be necessary for immediate collection of the account. If the claim goes into the hands of the attorney, we should like to have him notify us of that fact at once.

We thank you in advance for your assistance in this matter and enclose . . . . . cents in stamps to cover any postage expense you may be put to.

Yours very truly,

---

Gentlemen:

I enclose a draft for \$. . . . . upon . . . . . of . . . . . . . . . . . You will notice the draft is drawn by . . . . . to my order and is indorsed payable to your order.

I understand debtors are financially responsible and there is no dispute as to the correctness of the account. Their letter of . . . . . to . . . . ., traveling salesman for my client, promising to pay in full within a week or ten days, is attached.

Why the debtors do not pay has not been explained. The bills were sold on 60-day terms and some of the items, as you will observe, are now about seven months overdue. A further extension is out of the question. Will you kindly use your best efforts to collect the claim? If you succeed in collecting it before . . . . . charge me . . . . . per cent for your trouble. If you fail to collect it by . . . . ., please hand or mail this letter together with all papers enclosed to attorney . . . . . of . . . . ., who will accept this letter as his instructions to bring suit or to adopt whatever line of action seems necessary for the prompt collection of this long overdue balance. In that event I should like to have him notify me as soon as the papers reach his hands.

I hope you will be able to make the collection yourself and thank you in advance for your best efforts in that direction. To cover any postage expense to which you may be subjected, I enclose . . . . . cents in stamps.

Yours very truly,

A letter sent the delinquent under similar conditions by another house is the following:

Dear Sir:

Our draft of August 1 has been returned by our bankers marked "no attention." Previous to sending this draft numerous statements and letters were sent to you requesting a check to cover this long past-due account.

We dislike very much to take any action that would cause you annoyance and inconvenience but unless the matter is given proper consideration immediately, we shall place all papers in the hands of our Legal Department.

Assuming that you may prefer to make payment direct and avoid suit, we will hold our action in abeyance until Wednesday, September 10. Upon failure to receive payment within the stated time other steps will be necessary.

Yours very truly,

.....  
CREDIT MANAGER

**Other Threats of Suit.**—Other letters giving warning of legal procedure are shown below:

Dear Sir:

Having been unsuccessful in our attempts to draw out a response of any sort to our requests for a settlement of your past-due account we take it for granted that you would prefer to deal with our attorneys and are governing ourselves accordingly.

We believe matters will be arranged amicably and without extraordinary delay or expense.

Yours very truly,

Dear Sir:

Our various letters and telegrams remain unanswered. Your March, April, and May purchases amounting to \$95.15 as shown by the attached statement are long past due.

We have been quite lenient in allowing you this extra time and must now insist on immediate payment, otherwise the matter will be placed in the hands of our attorney for immediate attention.

Please do not oblige us to follow this course as under the circumstances it will prove distasteful to you as well as to ourselves.

Yours very truly,

.....  
CREDIT MANAGER

Dear Sir:

You have defaulted on the payments of your account for over three months, and therefore the full amount automatically becomes due.

As you have not responded to our letters we are drawing on you this day through the . . . . . for the full amount of your contract, and, unless this is paid promptly, our attorneys will be instructed to proceed against you.

Please be ready to take up the draft when the bank presents it.

Yours very truly,

**“Further Action.”**—Under certain circumstances it may be expedient to *suggest* intention to collect through attorney, rather than actually to threaten it. This method is used in the following letter written by the B. P. John Furniture Corporation of Portland, Oregon, and signed by the treasurer of the corporation:

Gentlemen:

The enclosed statement of account shows a balance of \$825.88, which will be further increased by your protested check in the sum of \$184.50 of which we received notice today.

This is the second protested check which we have had from you within the last six weeks and we must insist that you let us have a cashier's check at this time to cover the amount of this check of \$184.50.

We are not at all satisfied with the way you are taking care of this account, and it is going to be necessary for you to get it closer into line if we are to continue to ship merchandise to you.

We shall expect a reply from you by the 10th, outlining a schedule of payments which will enable you to clear out the past-due items during the current month, or it will be necessary for us to take further action in collecting.

Please do not fail to give this matter your consideration.

Yours very truly,

T. C. McINTIRE

Treasurer

## CHAPTER 16

### COLLECTION PROCEDURE—THE ULTIMATUM

**The House Collection Agency.**—Many houses desire to keep their hands on an account as long as possible. To protect a customer against harsh dealings from an outsider with consequent loss of goodwill and to save for the house the collector's fee, they try the effect of one or more form letters and a draft issued on a letterhead bearing the name of a collection agency—they themselves being the agency. The following letters were employed by a manufacturer selling direct to customers.

The first one in this series of three was sent to the customer.

Dear Sir:

We have been informed by the B. F. Heath Co. that they are unable to get any satisfaction from you, regarding their invoice of ..... for \$....., which is for goods purchased by you.

They have turned this account over to us for collection, but before we do anything, we want to ask if it is not possible to have a friendly settlement. We are sure that our client would prefer this, and it certainly would also be to your advantage.

If, however, we do not hear from you by . . . . ., we shall be obliged to forward a draft for this amount to your local bank with instructions, if it is not paid by you, to hand it to our attorney in your city.

We hope, however, that this action will not be necessary.

Yours very truly,

..... COLLECTION AGENCY

By.....

The following is a letter which the manufacturer sent to the bank:

Gentlemen:

Enclosed you will find our draft drawn on . . . . . for \$ . . . , for the goods shown on the enclosed bill. This bill is a copy of the original invoice of our client.

Will you please see that this draft is personally presented to Mr. . . . . and if it is not paid by him, please turn this entire matter, including the refused draft and the duplicate invoice over to . . . . ., Attorney at Law.

Yours very truly,

. . . . . COLLECTION AGENCY

By... ..

The following letter was sent to the attorney, together with a copy of the bank letter:

Dear Sir:

Enclosed you will find copy of our letter, to the . . . . . Bank, regarding our account against . . . . . We ask them to deliver this to you for collection, under the usual collection terms of 10 per cent, unless otherwise agreed upon

Yours very truly,

. . . . . COLLECTION AGENCY

By.....

**"Collection and Adjustment Bureau."**—The house collection agency of the H. T. Poindexter & Sons Merchandise Company of Kansas City, Mo., styled "Rapid Collection and Adjustment Bureau," uses this letter:

Re: H. T. Poindexter & Sons Mdse. Co.  
Kansas City, Mo.

Dear Sir:

Your account with the above firm in the amount of \$ . . . . . has been turned over to us for collection. Your creditor has tried to bring about collection, and has given the account into our hands only as a last resort.

We shall allow you a few days in which to make settlement before we file suit, and trust you will take advantage of this opportunity to save yourself the embarrassment of a suit, as well as court costs.

We want you to understand, however, that the money must be received within seven days, either by bank draft or money order. Otherwise we shall be obliged to proceed without further notice.

Yours truly,

RAPID COLLECTION AND ADJUSTMENT BUREAU

## FINAL NOTICE BEFORE SUIT

STATE OF MISSOURI, }  
COUNTY OF JACKSON } ss.

Docket No. \_\_\_\_\_

H. T. POINDEXTER & SONS MDSE. CO., Plaintiff

VS.

**Defendant**

To the Above Named Defendant:

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that the above named plaintiffs claim that you are indebted to them in the sum of \_\_\_\_\_ (\$ \_\_\_\_\_). Dollars for merchandise.

That the said debt is now overdue, and demand for payment has been repeatedly made.

That unless remittance is made to H. T. POINDEXTER & SONS MDSE. CO., at KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI, before the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 193\_\_\_\_, suit will be filed immediately to enforce payment of this claim together with interests and costs of said suit.

Dated at Kansas City, Missouri, this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 19\_\_\_\_.

### AFFIDAVIT OF ACCOUNT

STATE OF MISSOURI, } ss.  
COUNTY OF JACKSON

On this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 19\_\_\_\_, before me, a Notary

Public within and for said County of Jackson, Missouri, personally appeared \_\_\_\_\_  
who being by me duly sworn on his oath, says that the above account is correct and true, to the  
best of his knowledge and belief.



Subscribed and sworn to before me, this \_\_\_\_\_ day  
of \_\_\_\_\_ 19\_\_\_\_

Notary Public.

My Commission expires: \_\_\_\_\_

Figure 10. Form for Final Notice before Suit

This Bureau makes effective use of a “Final Notice Before Suit,” which is reproduced in Figure 10.

Another company, selling on instalments, desires to preserve goodwill as long as possible. Accordingly at the end of lengthy correspondence it issues two letters at 15-day intervals on the letterhead of its own agency. Harsh language is avoided.



Dear Sir:

Our client, the . . . . . of New York, has instructed us to collect a claim which they hold against you amounting to \$.....

The chief facts in the case, as reported to us, are: You signed on . . . . a definite contract to pay \$ . . . . for goods and service rendered by them. Our client alleges that he has lived up to his contract in every respect, and that you, on the other hand, have disregarded your obligation. According to our client's records you have paid only \$... . . . and the total balance of the account is now long overdue.

Do you dispute this statement of facts? Have you any counter claim? Is there any reason why you should not pay the account as stated?

An envelope for your use by return mail is enclosed. Please see that it brings either a definite statement for us to submit to our client or a remittance.

Yours very truly,

. . . . . COLLECTION AGENCY

. . . . .  
MANAGER

Dear Sir:

Please refer again to our letter which was written with one purpose in view—to adjust your account of \$. . . . without further expense and damage to your credit reputation.

Our long experience in the collection of past-due and delinquent accounts suggests a number of possible ways to treat this particular account.

In the absence of a statement from you relative to your position in this matter, we shall assume that you do not care to defend your action and shall proceed accordingly.

Whether or not you do reply to this letter is, of course, a matter of your own judgment.

We shall withhold further action for one week.

Yours truly,

. . . . . COLLECTION AGENCY

. . . . .  
MANAGER

Still another instalment company, after giving the debtor many opportunities for payment or explanation, issues a letter on agency stationery, more severe than those shown above.

At the same time it sends a printed form to the bank. The harshness is explained by the unusual credit risk involved.

Dear Sir:

The A. B. C. Corporation have sent us your account for collection.

You know all about the numerous letters they have written you. You know how you have failed to fulfill your part of the contract made with the A. B. C. Corporation. So it is unnecessary to spend any time trying to convince you why you should do as you had agreed to.

Perhaps you do not know that collecting debts which people contract and then fail to pay is our specialty. This is how we make our living.

Perhaps you do not know that we want immediate action from you regarding this account.

When an account is given us for collection by any of our clients, our system is to write ONE letter to the debtor. This is the one letter to you. It gives you the chance to settle your account without a law suit. It gives you the chance to make any explanation you have to offer for past carelessness and neglect of your just obligation. It gives you the opportunity to resume your payments and conduct your affairs with the A. B. C. Corporation on a business-like basis.

Our method of handling accounts like yours is to send this one letter and also to draw a draft. So we have today sent you this draft in care of your local bank. It is important that you arrange to honor this draft. The bank has instructions to give you five days to arrange to pay it.

Now about paying this draft, allow us to tell you something, based on our long experience in collecting debts. If you pay this draft, it is almost certain that you will continue to settle your account without further unpleasantness. And if you do not pay the draft, it is certain you will be sued, not only for the balance due the A. B. C. Corporation, but with the Court costs and attorney fees added.

For our system provides that when a debtor does not take advantage of this ONE letter—does not pay the draft—does not seem to care whether the debt is paid or NOT—we send the account to a local attorney, with directions to bring suit at once.

So from every standpoint—yours—ours—the A. B. C. Corporation's—we hope you will give immediate attention to this letter. Pay the draft and write us as to exactly what you can do about the balance of your account.

Yours very truly,

THE METROPOLITAN COLLECTING CO.

The following is the draft and memorandum sent to the bank:

	NEW YORK CITY..... \$.....
VALUE RECEIVED AND CHARGE ACCOUNT OF TO..... ..... .....	
AT FIVE DAYS' SIGHT, PAY TO THE ORDER OF THE BANK NAMED BELOW .....DOLLARS	
<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 40px; margin: 0 auto;"></div>	METROPOLITAN COLLECTING CO., NEW YORK CITY
FOR CREDIT ON OUR ACCOUNT WITH.....	
<hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/> <p><i>Gentlemen:</i></p> <p><i>We ask you to present for payment the attached draft to your order.</i></p> <p><i>Please return this memorandum when sending remittance, to enable us to identify the account drawn against.</i></p> <p><i>In the event that this draft is returned UNPAID, we would appreciate knowing whether we have the correct address and if so, what reason is given for nonpayment.</i></p> <p><i>Kindly have this draft presented personally. We enclose presentation fee. If there is a further charge we will be glad to pay it.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"> <b>YOURS VERY TRULY,</b>  <b>THE METROPOLITAN COLLECTING CO.</b>  <b>NEW YORK CITY</b> </p>	

Figure 11. Bank Draft with Memorandum Attached

**The Registered Letter.**—When the account has reached the stage of urgency, a registered letter has the value of assuring the creditor that his communication has been received; if no reply is forthcoming, the debtor has definitely “classified himself” by deliberately overlooking his obligations. A courteous assumption to make, in case the registered letter is used, is that previous correspondence has been overlooked by some subordinate, and this means is taken of bringing the account directly to the attention of a responsible official.

**The Outside Collection Agency.**—The function of the collection agency, as stated at the beginning of this chapter, is to save the credit man time in dealing with slow and doubtful accounts to which he has already given as much attention as he thinks desirable. The disadvantage of employing an agency is twofold. First, it is likely to injure or destroy goodwill; and second, the creditor may fall into the hands of an unreliable agency. For this latter, however, there is no excuse, as good agencies can be found in every section of the country. Many of the best agencies, moreover, take extraordinary pains to show fairness and to act as skilled mediators between creditor and debtor.

The effect of the agency on the debtor is largely psychological; if this were not true, the agency would in every case proceed directly to suit. When approached by it, the delinquent realizes that the time for evasion and neglect has gone past. His fear of ultimate consequences is sharpened, but he knows that he still has many opportunities for a slight delay before driving the agency to the expense of suit. Accordingly, one of the best cues for the agency is to point out that every additional delay will merely result in more expense for the debtor.

**Use of Appeal by the Agency.**—All the resources of collection psychology lie open to the collector or outside agency, with much of the same force that they possess for the creditor. Only resale arguments lose much of their meaning when proceeding from it, because the agency has no goods to sell nor credit to extend. But even so, it can urge with great force the debtor's advantage in maintaining his standing. This will have less effect if all these arguments have already been canvassed by the collection manager for the creditor; but many business houses, both retail and wholesale, utterly fail to use means of collection that lie ready near their hands, and turn the account over to the agency before even ordinary means have been exhausted. The agency can have the history of the transaction before it and can judge for itself what steps will be most effective. It can resort to draft, with notice in

advance, it can employ letters either form or dictated, it can be both lenient and severe, before resorting to whatever legal steps it deems advisable or reporting to the creditor that circumstances do not appear to justify suit.

A successful retail collector recognizes this situation by beginning one of his letters: "This claim was left with us for collection, not because of any less confidence in your word of honor or integrity, but because our client is desirous of getting the account settled and charged off his books." His letters are characterized by insistent questions, canvassing the whole list of reasons for the debtor's failure to reply and urging an answer in order to safeguard his reputation for promptness. He warns the debtor that he never gives up; vigilance and persistence are his mottoes; he will not rest so long as any reasonable means can be found for securing payment; but when these are exhausted, he will certainly and unhesitatingly use the legal means that lie ready to his hand.

**The Service of the Agency.**—What is the service of a collection agency? One of the forms employed by a well-known agency is reproduced herewith. A letter from the creditor gives warning that the account will be handed to a bonded attorney. Following this, the creditor sends direct to the debtor an advance notice of draft, informing him that if the draft is not honored the account will be turned over to an attorney for collection. The next step is to mail the draft to the bank. The sheet of which the draft is a part (see illustration, page 157) bears a slip instructing the bank, in the case of failure to pay, to hand the draft to an attorney who is named below. The slip of instructions to the bank can be torn off; the letter of advice to the attorney remains a part of the draft. A duplicate of this sheet is mailed direct at the same time to the debtor with the exception that in place of the slip of instructions to the bank the uppermost slip is addressed to the debtor informing him of the steps that are being taken. Thereafter the account is in the hands of the attorney for collection under special conditions, printed on the back of the draft.

**The Local Attorney as Collector.**—Among the quantities of claims turned over to any local attorney for collection some will be upon people he knows to be “good,” some will be upon those he knows to be notoriously poor pay, and some will be for goods that were purchased through oversolicitation of salesmen or that turned out not worth the purchase price. The strength of the attorney in every case is that he is on the ground and by personal conversation can discover where the cause for disagreement, if any, lies. If he shows fairness and friendliness, combined with an unhesitating determination to take the necessary steps, he can, in most cases, secure without friction any accounts that are really collectible. “I have absolutely no interest in this matter, except to see that fairness and justice are done,” writes one attorney. “Please call on me on the day you get this letter or call me up by telephone and make an appointment so as to get this matter off your mind with the least possible annoyance.”

**The Bank as Collector.**—Advice on this head is given by the National Association of Credit Men. When a draft has been returned unpaid and there is but one bank in a town, a new draft should be sent with an itemized statement. Allow the bank 1 or 2 per cent for collection; it is often wise to give the banker the full facts of the case. Frequently the bank, as the result of a carefully worded letter, will succeed in collection where an attorney might not be able to succeed short of suit, if at all. Often the creditor will find it satisfactory to address the cashier instead of the bank itself. Copies of all letters sent by the creditor to the debtor, can, after the account has been turned over, be sent to the bank together with the explanation that they are written to help the bank in its work.

One well-known jobber is accustomed to ask a bank to try to collect \$200 on a \$500 account within 10 days after receipt of the papers; to collect \$150 more in the succeeding ten days; and to secure the remainder within another 10 days. According to its success with this program, the bank is offered 2, 3, or 5 per cent. If it fails to collect, it is instructed to

SUBJECT: DRAFT ON _____ OF _____ DESTOR. _____		We take the name of your Bank from the "Guaranteed Attorneys Quarterly" of the United States Fidelity and Guaranty Company, Baltimore, Md.
<b>INSTRUCTIONS TO BANK.</b> (To be torn off before presenting.)		
Gentlemen: If attached draft on the debtor named herein is paid at maturity, PLEASE REMIT PROCEEDS DIRECT TO THE UNDERSIGNED. IF NOT PAID, please promptly deliver or mail same in enclosed stamped and addressed envelope to the attorney named below. DO NOT PROTEST.		
\$ _____	WITH CURRENT EXCHANGE _____	Holding Bond of the U. S. F. and G. Co.

---

<b>LETTER OF ADVICE TO ATTORNEY,</b> Identifying a Holder of the Bond of the United States Fidelity and Guaranty Company.	
To _____	ATTORNEY.
Address _____	
Dear Sir:—Payment of annexed Draft having been refused, you are hereby authorized to take prompt action for its collection on the terms stipulated on the back hereof. Promptly acknowledge receipt and advise what course is best to pursue. Wire, if in your opinion the circumstances warrant. Respectfully,	
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">           REMIT ALL MONEYS COLLECTED            BY P. O. MONEY ORDER, BANK            EXCHANGE OR EXPRESS.         </div>	
Address _____ Holding Bond of United States Fidelity and Guaranty Co., Baltimore, Md.	

DO NOT DETACH FROM DRAFT.

---


 <b>DRAFT OF A HOLDER OF THE BOND OF THE</b> <b>UNITED STATES FIDELITY AND GUARANTY COMPANY'S</b> <b>DEPARTMENT OF GUARANTEED ATTORNEYS.</b> Total Resources, Over \$7,500,000. Home Office, BALTIMORE, MD.	
\$ _____	19 _____
WITH CURRENT EXCHANGE.	
At _____ sight, Pay to the order of the _____ Bank of _____	
the sum of _____ Dollars,	
Value received and charge to account of _____	
WITH CURRENT EXCHANGE.	
To _____	DEBTOR.
Address _____	
Address _____ Holding Bond of United States Fidelity and Guaranty Co., Baltimore, Md.	

Figure 12. Agency Draft

This form shows the duties of bank and attorney in clear and simple outline. The duplicate to the drawee has a letter to him on the upper section instead of the instructions to the bank. (This form patented in U. S. July 21, 1914.)

send the papers at once to an attorney named by the creditor. In making large use of the banks under this program, this manager has found it advisable always to enclose 25 cents in stamps with the papers.

**Cooperation with the Bank.**—While collection by bank draft is a method used with some frequency by credit departments, and particularly by house collection agencies, it has not yet reached its maximum usefulness because of incomplete teamwork between banking institutions and credit managers.

One reason for this condition is doubtless the belief of some credit managers that the charges on drafts are out of proportion to the value of the service performed. This is a conclusion which does not appear to be thoroughly supported by the facts. In collecting on drafts the bank has a very valuable service to sell to the creditor. It comes into action after the credit department's best efforts at collection have failed, and puts on the debtor a pressure that is direct, vigorous, and usually effective. The debtor may be callous to the appeals of a supplier who is hundreds if not thousands of miles away. But he is extremely sensitive when the bank in his home town enters the picture.

Another factor which impedes cooperation between banks and credit departments is the much debated question of bank charges for credit information. This has, of course, no direct connection with the use of drafts as a collection device. It goes back to the period of appraisal, before the credit relation is actually established. But this is unquestionably a sore point with many credit managers, and it probably affects some of them to such an extent that they consciously avoid, whenever possible, direct dealings with banking institutions.

This grievance nursed by the credit manager is not entirely without justification. He is constantly giving credit information to banks, at no small trouble and expense to his concern. Rarely, if ever, does the bank offer to reimburse the company, and in many cases it does not even send a perfunctory line of acknowledgment. The credit department would seem to be entitled to at least a reciprocal courtesy, but when it calls



on the bank for specific information about the financial standing of one of its customers it is more than likely to receive a curt response such as "Account satisfactory" or "Maintains a fair balance." And when this meager information is accompanied by a bill for fifty cents or a dollar, "in accordance with our rules," the credit manager can scarcely be blamed for feeling that insult has been added to injury.

It should not, of course, be inferred that such procedure as this is characteristic of all banks. Some of them thoroughly realize the importance of courteous cooperation with credit departments. But not enough of them. And so long as the undiscerning ones continue their present short-sighted policy, they will be deprived of substantial profits they might make if credit managers made more extensive use of the draft for collection purposes.

## CHAPTER 17

### WRITING THE LETTER

**Important and Difficult Work.**—The writer of credit and collection correspondence has perhaps a more difficult task than the writer in any other department in the house. He has rights which must be very carefully safeguarded; he must make no false admissions or promises which weaken the case of his house against the delinquent; he must not show weakness, or he will arouse contempt, and cause the customer to disregard his correspondence; neither must he show undue harshness, lest he arouse anger, create a stubborn, defiant attitude, and perhaps be driven to severe action which will lose the customer. In spite of these restrictions, his letters must be varied enough to avoid the deadly monotony which, more than any other one cause, is responsible for the failure of many collection letters to get results. He must show a convincing logic, in order to demonstrate his mental superiority, and force the delinquent to respect him; for without respect he will be slow in securing results. His tone must always be reserved and cautious; he has not the license of the sales or advertising writer to show enthusiasm. In many cases he has not even a letter to which he may dictate a reply; he has not even new facts to guide his successive letters. His is an art which must be exercised under severe limitations and calls for exceptional ingenuity and resourcefulness.

Nevertheless, if the writer of credit or collection letters appreciates the possibilities of resale, if he studies the psychology of the average debtor, and if he familiarizes himself with the multitude of possible appeals and the variety of methods and devices that have been successfully used by others, and that are set forth in various chapters of this book, he will hardly be conscious of his limitations.

**Write Your Own Letters.**—It is the “accent of reality” which above all else the writer of collection letters must cultivate. For this reason he needs to go very cautiously in using, without alteration, letters written by others, as for instance, the letters illustrated in this book. The best practice is to read and study such letters, weighing their phrasing and gauging their effectiveness for the situation he has in hand; then rewriting them as far as may be necessary in order to make them sound like his own language. This does not imply that a collection man may not with profit model his own practice on that of other successful men in his field, but it does mean that he can, without much effort, give to his own letters the color of his own personality.

**The Value of Form Letters.**—Form letters in collections have great value; not only in saving time and expense, but what is of far greater importance, in providing a carefully prepared letter that avoids the dangers that beset all but the highly skilled writer, and a letter, moreover, that is interesting, logical, and compelling.

The form letter can be used in three ways, as: (1) a guide form, (2) a paragraph form, or (3) a complete form.

The guide form is a letter which the dictator has under his eye at the time of dictation, but which he remodels and phrases to fit the exact case he is dealing with, retaining perhaps only its logical outline.

The paragraph form is a loose-leaf book made up of paragraphs specially prepared or taken from previously dictated correspondence, classified so that one or more pages are filled with paragraphs relating to a given subject, or fitted for the beginning, the middle, or the end of the letter. These are especially useful for the rapid handling of correspondence after a reply has been received from a delinquent, although they are also very useful at any stage of operation. The dictator turns the pages of his book, determines on the paragraphs he desires, and notes them in order on a slip which is given to the typist, who is provided with a copy of the book in which the paragraphs are contained. She then types the

letter and submits it for signature. This provides for individually typed letters, which have all the directness and sincerity of specially dictated letters. They have even greater variety than the usual dictated correspondence, which is likely to get into a rut; and under most circumstances they have greater force.

If the complete form has been printed or mimeographed, and is kept in quantity ready to be issued on occasion, the greatest pains should be taken to fill in with precision the name and address and any inserts; for the appearance of carelessness or of machine methods tempts the customer to be careless in turn, and to pay little attention to formal and impersonal requests for payment.

But the complete form can be individually typed, either by hand or by the automatic typewriter. This permits the filling in of name and address, the amount due, the dates of previous letters, or personal references to the customer's business, etc., so that the letter presents a uniform appearance. The typist is supplied with these data and with the number of the form to be typed. If the automatic typewriter is used, the additional data should be run in at the end of paragraphs, so as to avoid the difficulty of making the data exactly fill the space left in the middle of a paragraph.

Perhaps the best plan, where forms are to be used, is to supply each typist and each member of the credit and collection staff with a book containing a number of complete forms, and a section devoted to paragraph forms. These can be revised at fixed intervals, so as to prevent the same letter being sent to the customer twice. Frequently only slight revision will be sufficient to change completely the character of the letter. At the same time, one or more multigraphed forms may be used at the beginning of the series, and, if so, may be bound up in the book. An outline of the procedure of the department may be bound up in the same book, thus bringing all necessary matters under one cover.

**Attention to "Symptomatic Detail."**—The chief of a credit or collection department is a busy official, with many important

constructive matters depending on him. He realizes that the most important part of his work is the forming of decisions; whether credit accommodation shall be granted and in what amount; whether extensions shall be allowed; whether severity or leniency shall be shown. He is tempted to feel that the language in which his decisions are conveyed is a mere matter of detail which can be left to his subordinates and he may even pay little attention to securing effectiveness in the language of his own dictated correspondence. True, it is poor efficiency for a superior officer to be concerned largely with detail. Nevertheless, there is a certain type of detail which merits his attention and which students of efficiency methods dignify by the term "symptomatic detail."

A superior officer should at stated intervals look over the carbon copies of letters issued from his department; not in large volume, but enough to give a cross-section of the method employed. If forms are employed, he can glance over them and make suggestions for their improvement, indicating rather the lines which they should follow than the exact phrasing.

**The Department Manual.**—This is readily accomplished through the department manual, containing in outline the duties of each member of the department, the procedure and system for following up accounts, and copies of all forms. New members of the department should receive their training through this manual and all questions of policy should be decided by its aid or entered in it, if not already to be found there.

Under these conditions an executive may have under his control the tremendously important matter of his departmental correspondence without being obliged to burden himself by unnecessary attention to detail.

**The Study of Examples.**—One of the best ways of learning to write letters is by reading good examples. Any letter has several elements to which especial attention may be paid. The outline of its ideas may prove suggestive; the way in which the thought advances from point to point and the logical con-

clusion is enforced, may be the significant matter, or on reading the letter one may be struck by an original phrase or sentence which more than the rest "rings true." Whatever appeals to the reader as possessing naturalness, courtesy, logic, force, interest, or any other desirable quality can be noted for reference and employed on a later occasion. A good story can be retold in the writer's own words or it may suggest to him other stories equally good. A sentence may bring to his mind some way of saying the same thing either more crisply, or perhaps more fully and clearly, for the particular man to whom he is writing. Often he will find a sentence or paragraph expressing the idea so well that he wants to employ it in his own letters just as it stands.

A study of examples should strengthen, not weaken, the writer's own power of writing forceful, compelling letters; of saying things in such a way as to secure instant respect and to convey just the shade of goodwill or urgency which he desires.

**Visualize the Reader.**—Whenever you sit down to write a letter, look straight into the eyes of the man you are addressing. Summon him up before you in a mental picture; remember his personal characteristics, the nature of his past relations, his local business conditions, and any facts you may know about the state of his personal business. Refer to the salesman's report or to any data proceeding from some one who has known the customer personally, endeavoring in that way to bridge the gap of distance that separates you and him, and to call up before your eyes his bodily image, seated in the chair at the corner of your desk. Unconsciously this method of visualizing your reader will shape the letter you write. It will prevent your language from getting hackneyed, and will give it the "accent of reality" when it is read by your customer.

Jolt yourself out of your own point of view a moment and look at the matter from his point of view. Think of the reasons—the real, honest-to-goodness, brass-tack facts that are in all probability preventing the payment of the money due you. Remember your own experiences when you have been

a debtor and found it inconvenient to pay at the time you were called on.

Then turn around and resume your present situation. Remember your rights and the customer's obligation. Remember that your interests and his alike demand prompt payment, and that the man who gives good advice in sincere friendship is doing the other fellow a better turn than the man who carries good nature to an extreme and allows the customer to get into the habit of believing his own excuses. It is a better favor to help your friend stiffen up his backbone and arouse his determination than to encourage him to play the jellyfish. A good, vigorous dose of resale doctrine or constructive credits may reawaken his optimism and his fighting spirit.

**What to Say and How to Say It.**—The task of writing the letter includes not only finding *how* to say the thing, but also deciding *what* to say; not only hitting upon the right phrases but also canvassing the whole range of facts which lies at the disposal of the writer of collection letters. He is likely to "run dry" and to rehash the same ideas again and again, unless he comes in stimulating contact with the work of other men in his field. Then he not only learns to adapt their material, but finds suggestions in it for new material developed from the field of his own experiences.

**Essential Precautions.**—A few points should always be kept in mind by the writer of collection letters. Determine the facts of the case, the amount due, the date when due, the dates of previous communications and their nature, whether any payment has been made up to the moment the letter is mailed, whether any part of the amount is in dispute or is being made the subject of a claim, and just what is the basis of fact behind any statements of the debtor.

Never threaten criminal proceedings or employ threats of any character. A mere suggestion of unpleasant consequences, of the visit of an attorney, or collector, of lost credit standing, or the costs and unpleasant notoriety of suit, is sufficient without making actual threats. A threat may make one liable

to federal or state law. Never collect by postcard or print a statement on the outside of an envelope likely to reflect upon the recipient. Precise rulings on any material to be used can be obtained from a postal inspector by asking the aid of local postal authorities.

**Long or Short Letters?**—The short letter, other things being equal, suggests action. The long letter suggests discussion and consideration. Accordingly, except in very rare instances, a collection letter should be short. It need almost never exceed a single page; if paragraphs are single-spaced, with double spacing between them, and still more if the elite type is used, hardly one letter in a thousand need run over one page.

A short letter suggests that there is no use talking about the matter; the facts are as stated and the mere suggestion of an appeal to goodwill or fair play, etc., will surely be sufficient to secure prompt action.

A long letter, on the other hand, implies, "Let us have a serious talk about this matter. I do not believe you have given it consideration, or appreciated its full gravity. I want to help you to look at the matter in the proper light." But if a letter is long, that is to say, a full page or nearly so, it must carefully exclude all meaningless words and sentences and marshal before the eyes of the debtor a close-packed array of facts and arguments which demonstrate the strength of the creditor's position.

It is a good plan for letters in a series to vary somewhat in length, so that they do not all look alike to the customer. This arouses his interest and he is more likely to read each letter with attention.

**Does a Delinquent Deserve Courtesy?**—The question of "good treatment" or "rough treatment" has been abundantly discussed elsewhere in this book. Unfailing courtesy is always more productive of respect, and in the long run is more likely to lead to action than severity. Sarcastic statements arouse anger and do not secure action, so, although they may be useful



as a means of relieving the creditor's feelings, they hardly add to the efficiency of his department. Write such letters if you want to; but let them cool for twenty-four hours and then throw them into the waste-basket.

"Yes," responds some collection manager, "but you forget that this man has defaulted in his obligations. What right has he to my courtesy?" Well, possibly he has no right, though it must be remembered that in his own home town he is walking the streets with the respect and esteem of his fellow townsmen, and if his conscience pricks him with the thought of this defaulted obligation, he consoles himself with the memory of the far greater number of instances in which he has honorably lived up to requirements. To some degree the foregoing is true of every delinquent.

But the question is not solely of his rights; it is chiefly "What is the most effective means of securing the money and of keeping the customer?"

**Diplomatic Language.**—It must never be forgotten that the man who handles credit or collection letters is working in a powder factory, where a careless step may strike a spark that will blow the whole establishment into the air. A business man's "credit conscience" is the tenderest part of his anatomy, and he does not like to have it roughly handled.

"No, I don't bother with diplomacy in letters," said one credit man presiding over the city desk in a wholesale company. "If one of my customers exceeds his credit limits or anything like that, I have him come in and then I have it out with him." The testimony of his customers was that he needlessly irritated them by blunt and brusque questions when a little diplomacy would have achieved the results and improved goodwill.

The language used in diplomatic correspondence, of which many remarkable examples have been before the public in the last few years, illustrates the caution and reserve necessary in treating subjects which concern such sensitive matters as national honor. A single clumsy statement, a moment's indiscretion, may have serious consequences; while any lack

of firmness or failure to show intellectual strength would be interpreted by the opponent as an evidence of weakness.

The point in which diplomats must be especially cautious is that of not attributing to the party addressed, improper motives for action committed. The action may be stated impersonally; then some assumption favorable to the good intentions of the other party may be mentioned, and his conduct in the past may be brought in as evidence to show why the writer is confident of his present good intentions. If the writer strongly suspects improper motives, he will express, when mentioning them, extreme reluctance to believe that they can possibly exist.

One highly diplomatic manner of handling unpleasant subjects is to speak frankly of the writer's own shortcomings in these particulars. "I realize perfectly," the credit man may write, "that many circumstances may occur which embarrass a merchant in making payment as promptly as his own good business sense would advise him. We have been in business too many years not to have had experience in such matters ourselves. At the same time I can say that we have tried to make it a matter of policy to have at all times the frankest understanding between ourselves and our creditors, believing that this is the only satisfactory method in the long run." By a study of the chapter on psychology, the writer will often see how a subject, which, when carelessly handled, would arouse anger, shame, or fear in such a way as to delay payment and injure goodwill, can be turned into an appeal to pride, or self-interest, or goodwill, reselling the customer and getting the money. A single sharp phrase, indirectly introduced, is usually more effective in case of need than a letter filled with threats. On the other hand, certain types of business men understand no language save that of the "big stick."

**Specific Language.**—The previous section has shown the importance, in dealing with the customer's motives for failure to pay, of using diplomatic language. At the same time in order to produce action the letter must employ specific language. But this specific language can be restricted to topics not likely

to cause offense; for example, some experience, action, or portion of office routine of the writer or the customer. For instance, "This morning Mr. Walton laid on my desk a memorandum showing our correspondence on your account. I see that it indicates dates of January 4, January 14, January 24, as the ones on which we have sent you reminders"—or another example, "Yesterday's issue of the *Wall Street Journal* contained the following statement"—or again, "Just put on your memorandum pad for August 10, 'Send Smith check for \$150'"—or a very direct appeal, "Now, suppose you turn to your bookkeeper and say, 'Miss Jones, make out a check for Smith and Company.'"

Instances like the foregoing could be multiplied; a great many are to be found in the letters shown throughout this book. A single phrase of specific language, especially if it pictures some action so clearly as to bring it vividly before the reader's mind, is a powerful incentive to action. Coming at the beginning of the letter, it arouses interest and secures attention; coming at the end it suggests immediate response.

**Working for a Twofold Result.**—Whenever a collection man prepares a form or sits down to dictate a letter, he has his eye on two results, namely, collection and resale; he is determined to get the money, and he is equally determined to retain or even to increase goodwill. If the collection of the outstanding account alone secures his attention, he will not unnaturally show the severity which the delinquent deserves. But if he looks beyond this transaction to friendly relations in the future and estimates the volume of business which the coming years may bring from this customer, he is more likely to realize that the present difficulty is but an incident in the history of their dealings, and that by means of tact and good advice he may eventually bring the slow-pay man into the good-pay class.

**What Action Is Wanted?**—The action desired is prompt payment in full; part payment on a basis agreed upon; a definite agreement to pay at a certain time or times; or an answer

explaining the debtor's position, on the basis of which an arrangement may be made. Any one of these may be the result which the collection man works toward when writing a letter. He will not have determined on his objective without an analysis of the situation. If he has determined to secure payment in full, his letter will not suggest or imply that any other basis for settlement will be accepted. If he makes an offer of a different character, it must be clear-cut and definite, and his letter, however reasonable in tone, must not imply any weakening from this position. It is frequently a good plan to put such an offer last in the letter, so that no qualifying statement may appear to impair its force. Of course, it may be desirable to follow such an offer with a statement that other less lenient measures will follow should he fail to take advantage of this offer.

**Outlining the Letter.**—Just as the procedure of a collection department must be clear-cut and definite, advancing from point to point with the sureness of a skilled chess player who is certain of victory, so the various paragraphs of a collection letter or credit letter must show clear organization, giving evidence of a mind that has the end in view from the beginning. However lenient such a letter may be in tone, its logical outline must show the strong hand under the velvet glove. A letter which rambles or introduces unnecessary matter, or which draws illogical conclusions, is worse than no letter at all. Herein lies the difficulty of correspondence on this subject, which drives some executives to a belief in letters of only two or three sentences, or in sending telegrams. The difficulty with the correspondence and procedure which is restricted as it were to monosyllables, is that there is nothing constructive in it; there is only a series of urgent demands. If the debtor is sullen or discouraged he will disregard this kind of communication as long as possible, while the creditor has forfeited his opportunity for building goodwill and developing him into a source of more profitable relations.

In general, the safe rule for all correspondence is to put facts first and comments later. This shows fairness and

avoids misunderstanding; the facts speak for themselves and the comments which follow can be more guarded without losing effect. A typical outline begins by stating facts of unanswered correspondence, broken promises, etc.; then suggests possible causes for this; then includes resale material, such as a courteous statement of fundamental credit principles; then states the customer's own undoubted appreciation of the foregoing facts, and requests action.

Another typical outline begins with a request for action, followed by specific statement of the reason for asking it, concluding with a statement of confidence.

Still another logical structure begins with some sort of "hypothetical question," an anecdote or illustration, followed by a statement of the present situation between the creditor and his customer, showing how it parallels the foregoing situation, and concluding with a request for action. In the chapters on psychology and on procedure, as well as on selling and reselling credit, various suggestions will be found for the organization of the individual letter, both in principle and in example.

**Long Sentences, Short Sentences, and Questions.**—A very different effect is produced by the same statement if put in different sentence forms. A long sentence may produce the effect of courtesy and diplomacy; a short sentence is incisive and emphatic, and carries an air of finality; while a question points a vigorous finger straight at the reader, challenging his attention. "We need hardly remind you that in fairness to our other customers who abide by our terms and to whom we make the same prices as to yourselves, we are unable to allow extensions unless some specific arrangement is made in advance," is a statement which produces one effect on the reader. "We cannot allow extensions when no arrangement has been made," produces a different effect. Still more insistent in its claim for attention is the question, "Is it fair to take an extension without making definite arrangements with us?" or, "Do you think we can allow any of our customers to take an extension without previous definite arrangement?"

**An Abrupt Beginning.**—The usual business letter, including that from the credit or collection department, begins with some courteous and unemphatic statement referring to the date of previous correspondence or other matter of routine. Consequently it is not a bad plan, especially in collecting petty accounts or where correspondence has been persistently neglected, to begin abruptly, as with the question, "Can you tell us of any good reason why you have not settled your account?" Such a sentence comes like a blow in the face. The rest of the letter may be entirely courteous and appeal to pride, goodwill, or fair play; indeed, it is well to give it this character. But the reader has received a jolt that makes him "sit up and take notice." If the remainder of the letter is courteous, he will not feel angered. Such devices should be used only when fully justified.

**Paragraph Structure.**—What has been said about the length and form of sentences applies also to paragraphs. The best test of this statement is to go over some of the letters in the chapters on procedure, and compare the effect of long and short paragraphs, or of the paragraph that begins with a question or with a short sentence as opposed to the paragraph that begins with a long sentence. It is advisable not to make paragraphs of the same length; if one consists of two or three lines and the next of four or five and the next of seven or eight, the effect on the reader's attention is better. Credit and collection correspondence, because of the diplomacy and caution needed, may use longer paragraphs than ordinary business correspondence.

**A Final Word.**—The great importance of letters depends on the oft repeated fact that they are the representatives of the house which issues them. That is to say, the customer sees only the correspondence. Occasionally he receives a visit from a salesman; at long intervals he may attend a convention or visit the house which sells him goods or receive a personal call from a representative of the credit department. But, for the most part it is the correspondence which represents to

him the house. If letters are short, monotonous, uninteresting; if they show no real constructive regard for the merchant's welfare and contain no friendly, personal touches, they have little chance to build goodwill or to produce a constructive effect in improving the attitude of the customer towards his credit responsibility.

The man who gets inside the envelope and journeys out to visit his customer with a friendly greeting and warm hand-clasp, stands a better chance of having his requests listened to than the man whose letters convey no impression of his personality. The reputation and wide influence of some of the foremost credit men in America have been secured in no small measure through their uncommon ability, gained in daily practice, to write good letters. They can talk to the customer with the same cordiality and interest as if he were seated beside the credit desk, and despite the handicap of distance, they can reach a logical, constructive solution of their common problems.

## CHAPTER 18

### ROUTINE AND SPECIAL LETTERS

**Putting Principles into Practice.**—The broad principles of effective letter-writing apply to all collection letters—routine, form, and special. Some credit managers take the position that there is, or at least should be, no such thing as a routine or form letter in collection work. This point of view is held, for example, by the credit manager of the Black and Decker Manufacturing Company of Towson, Maryland, who says: “Personally I do not use any form letters, as I do not feel that satisfactory results can be obtained from them. From past experience I believe that it is necessary to treat each customer as a separate individual, and you cannot handle any two individuals in the same manner. We deal with each account on its own merits, and in the manner we think is best designed to obtain the desired results.”

**Routine Letters.**—Many credit departments do, however, make extensive use of form letters. Typical of these are the Poindexter “period letters” reproduced in Chapter 13 (page 126). Another short series is the following used by a Philadelphia manufacturing concern:

*(First letter)*

Dear Sir:

May we call your attention at this time to the overdue portion of your account, amounting to \$. . . . .?

If the nonpayment of this balance is due to an oversight, we are confident that, the matter now having been brought to your attention, you will gladly favor us with a check by return mail.

Appreciating your cooperation, we are

Yours very truly,



*(Second letter)*

Dear Sir:

\$ . .

According to our records, your account shows an overdue balance in the amount indicated above. You have, no doubt, overlooked this.

Kindly favor us with your early remittance, in the amount specified, in order that your account may be brought in line with our usual credit terms.

Yours very truly,

---

*(Third letter)*

Dear Sir:

If you had answered either of the two letters we recently sent you about your account, or had acknowledged the several statements forwarded monthly, we should be, no doubt, in a position to understand the delay in payment of your past due account. But since we have had no word from you we are totally at a loss to understand the situation.

Our own obligations mature with very definite regularity and our ability to meet them is necessarily dependent on the reasonable promptness with which our good friends pay their accounts.

When we say that we try to cooperate with our good customers in extending reasonable time, beyond our regular terms, we believe that you will agree with us, basing the conclusion on the period of time over which your present indebtedness extends.

We feel that we are not asking too much now when we request you to forward your check for \$ . . . , but if it is not convenient to send that amount just now, we hope that you will at least acknowledge the receipt of this letter and let us know about when we may expect to receive your check in settlement of the past-due portion of your account.

We try to cooperate with our good friends in every possible way and we assure you of our willingness to accede to a further reasonable extension.

Yours very truly,

*(Fourth letter)*

Dear Sir:

According to our records, the past-due portion of your account, amounting to \$ . . . . . , and to which we have three times directed your attention, is still unpaid.

In order that your credit standing may not be impaired, it is essential that your remittance reach us by early mail. We have been very lenient with you and regret that you have not considered it necessary to reply to our communications or to remit even part of the past-due portion of your account.

In view of this attitude on your part, we must now advise you that if we do not hear from you within fifteen days from this date, we shall feel compelled to place your account for collection. Please avoid this by sending your check in the enclosed addressed envelope.

Yours very truly,

**Three Letters—Four Days.**—Here is a series of three actual letters—two from a credit department and one from a customer. The first letter was written on January 18; the customer's reply on January 20; and the credit department's acknowledgment and follow-up on January 21:

The ..... Company, Inc.,  
Syracuse, N. Y.

Gentlemen:

We wish to acknowledge with thanks receipt of your order #13290, but upon referring to your account we regret to advise you that we do not feel justified in making shipment of this order until we receive a check from you for a substantial amount.

You are owing us at this time \$457.98 which is very much past due, representing a balance on your May account of \$100.00; June, \$20.30; July, \$6.50; August, \$39.20; September, \$40.92; October, \$.61; November, \$340.10; less credits of \$8.30 in July and \$81.35 in December.

We must request a check which will at least take care of your account to August 1 before shipping the goods. We dislike very much to withhold shipment of your order and sincerely hope that the requested settlement will be forthcoming so that immediate shipment can be made.

Very truly yours,

THE BLACK & DECKER MFG. CO.

The Black & Decker Mfg. Co.,  
Towson, Md.

Gentlemen:

Your letter of the 18th is received. To be sure we shouldn't have sent the order without sending you a check and this account of yours should have been taken care of before this, but we have never found it so difficult to get any money out of our customers, and we have to be slow and perhaps impose on some of our friends.

We are handing you a check herewith, which is sufficient, we trust, to enable you to fill the order. We will get more around to you as rapidly as possible

We thank you for your assistance through these difficult times.

Very truly yours,

THE ..... COMPANY, INC.

---

The .... Company, Inc.,  
Syracuse, N. Y.

Gentlemen:

We wish to acknowledge with thanks the receipt of yours of the 20th, in reply to ours of the 18th, enclosing your check #50428 in the amount of \$120.30 in settlement of your May and June accounts.

After placing the amount of this check to your credit, there remains a balance of \$337.68, which was fully explained in our letter of the 18th. We sincerely hope that within the very near future you will be able to send us another check which will at least take care of your account to November 1, as it would take only \$78.93 to do this.

As you can readily realize, we have endeavored to cooperate with you to the best of our ability, but as our own resources are limited we cannot allow an account to become too far past due because we have a great many accounts which are depending on us for assistance. If there were only a few, it would be a different matter.

We appreciate the settlement which you have just sent to us and have entered for immediate shipment your order #13290.

Very truly yours,

THE BLACK & DECKER MFG. CO.

**Making Correspondence Easy for the Debtor.**—The ingenious form illustrated in Figure 13b was devised by H. H. Brubaker, comptroller of the L. A. Young Spring and Wire Corporation of Detroit. The use of the form is admirably described in the memorandum prepared by Mr. Brubaker and sent, with a supply of the forms, to the company's subsidiaries:

### - WHY THIS FORM -

1. This form is not a cure-all, BUT it eliminates a large volume of writing and likewise saves time and labor for John Doe who owes you an account. His reply to your request for payment is to a large extent prepared for him. So many small and medium-sized companies have inadequate correspondence facilities and for that reason letter-writing is a task to them and much of the time neglected. This form helps the debtor solve part of his problems and at the same time relieves the credit man's anxiety as to "Why doesn't he say something—one way or the other?"
2. They can be used on the majority of a company's slow accounts, but there will always be a number of customers to whom the wise credit executive will want to write in more of a personal appeal manner, or to call attention to some particular agreement, etc.
3. The form is printed on colored paper for the purpose of attracting attention and to further this end Accounts Payable Department is printed in large black letters.
4. Forms are used by nearly all places of business in the way of purchase orders, quotations, requests for quotations, shipping schedules, material releases, notices, etc., therefore as a time and labor saver why not use forms in collection work. No one is offended because he receives a purchase order, release of material or anything of that sort on a form and by the same token he should not object to a past-due account reminder on a time-saving form.
5. Two copies are sent to the customer so that one copy of his reply can be retained by him.
6. Time saver to both the credit men and stenographic department. For instance, John Doe owes \$750.00, October 15th invoice and it is 15 or 20 days past due. The one dictating simply says—

"Form letter  
 "To John Doe—Address  
 "#1—Oct. 15, \$750.00  
 #2—Check  
 #3—Check"

The stenographer in transcribing simply types the above opposite the numbers indicated on the form and where the word check is used an "X" is typed. A week or 10 days later, if no reply has been received, the credit department need only take the office copy and make pencil notation thereon as follows:

#1-2-3—Ditto  
 #4—Check


and pass the copy on to the stenographer who types up another set and with the #4 block X'd also.

7. The arrangement or wording on the form can be changed to suit any particular requirements or line of business.

H. H. BRUBAKER,

L. A. YOUNG SPRING & WIRE CORPORATION

DETROIT - OAKLAND - WINDSOR



**L.A. YOUNG SPRING AND WIRE CORPORATION**  
 9200 RUSSELL STREET  
**DETROIT, MICHIGAN**

REPLY ATTENTION OF \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Accounts Payable Department**

Gentlemen:—

With a view of saving time and clerical labor this form has been prepared for our mutual benefit. Please refer to space indicated by (X). An early reply will be appreciated.

1	We find the following invoices are past due. _____ _____ Total \$ _____	<b>YOU</b> may use this side for your reply Indicate by (X) _____ Our check enclosed for \$ _____
2	We shall appreciate your check now to cover the past due account.	Will mail check on or about _____
3	Is there any particular reason why you are with-holding payment?	We have not paid account because _____ _____
4	SECOND request for settlement of the account.	Did not receive invoice—Send copy.
5	_____	Remarks _____ _____ _____

Retain one copy for your file.

**L. A. YOUNG SPRING & WIRE CORP.**

By \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Auditor  
☐ Credit Mgr.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Figure 13b, Printed Blank Form Sent Debtors

**A Shorter Form.**—The same idea has been used by B. F. Avery & Sons, Inc., of Louisville, whose credit manager devised the following form:

CONFIDENTIAL

Gentlemen:

We indicate below by a cross-mark our reason for not having paid our account with you of \$ ..... .

..... Oversight  
 ..... Error or overcharge  
 ..... Disagreement as to price or terms  
 ..... Slow collections  
 ..... Unsatisfactory sales  
 ..... We enclose \$.....  
 ..... Will remit in ..... days  
 ..... Will honor draft through ..... bank of .....  
 ..... Request ..... days' extension according to signed  
                     note herewith

Remarks.....  
 .....  
 .....

Yours truly,

**"Fiscal Year" Letters.**—As the time for the annual audit approaches, credit departments have a good peg on which to hang extra collection pressure. The following are good examples of the special "fiscal year" letter:

RE: ANNUAL AUDIT\*

Gentlemen:

Our fiscal year closes June 30. In order that our past-due balances may be at a minimum we are asking your cooperation. Please have the small past-due balance on your account settled before June 20.

Our records indicate a balance on your account on June 1 of \$..... Of this, \$.. ..... is past due.

Your cooperation in having this past-due item closed out before our auditors take over the books will be very much appreciated.

We wish at this time to express our thanks for the business with which you have favored us, and we hope to have a much larger volume from you during the coming season.

Yours truly,

---

\* Printed in red.

LEST YOU FORGET\*

Gentlemen:

The small balance of \$ . . . . . on your account which is now due.

Our fiscal year closes June 30 and this reminder is sent so that the small balance is not carried into our new fiscal year's business.

Thanking you for past favors and soliciting your further valued orders, we are

Yours very truly,

---

Gentlemen:

Your failure to respond to our letter of . . . . . or forward check for \$. . . . . leads us to wonder if you are temporarily short of funds. If this is the case, please advise us, because we want to cooperate with you in every way.

Our fiscal year closes June 30, and there is still time to have this small balance taken care of if you will mail your check upon receipt of this letter. If you are unable to do so, please advise when we may expect remittance so as to avoid the annoyance to you and the expense to us of these constant reminders.

Thanking you for your attention to this matter, we are

Yours truly,

---

Gentlemen:

We shall appreciate your comparing our July 1 statement with your books and advising us if the balance of \$. . . . ., of which \$. . . . . is now due, is in accord with your records. We are now starting in on our new fiscal year and should like to know if our records are in accord with yours. If you find this amount to be correct, check to cover balance will be appreciated.

Thanking you for past favors and soliciting your further valued orders, we are

Yours truly,

**"Short Line" Letters.**—In the credit department of the J. K. Gill Company of Portland, Ore., letters so short as to be almost telegraphic are used with good results. Here are five of them:

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\* Printed in red.

Gentlemen:

Your statement . . . . . 1st was \$.....

May we thank you for the courtesy of a check at this time?

Very truly yours,

---

Gentlemen:

"Believe it or not."

We can use money to good advantage.

Can't you let your check come in now?

Very truly yours,

---

Gentlemen:

Are things looking any better for you by now?

Can you handle all or part of the balance of that little account of \$..... ?

Very truly yours,

---

Gentlemen:

Aren't we entitled to a reply to our letter of .....?

Statement enclosed.

Balance due \$.....

For any courtesy you may expect us to grant on the account further than July 10 we shall deem a request necessary.

Very truly yours,

---

Gentlemen:

In the handling of small items more than one statement means considerable extra expense.

May we have remittances promptly, please?

Very truly yours,



## CHAPTER 19

### COLLECTIONS BY TELEPHONE AND TELEGRAPH

**A Modern Method.**—During the past few years there has been a marked increase in the use of the telephone in collection work. Retail credit managers, and particularly those connected with department stores, have used this method for some time, but only recently have the credit departments of wholesaling and manufacturing concerns discovered that they were overlooking a most convenient and effective means of speeding up the collection process.

This method has, of course, both advantages and disadvantages. Of the latter, the chief one is the danger of friction developed by the use of the telephone at an inopportune time or by an employee deficient in judgment or diplomacy. There is sound sense in the rule established in many credit departments providing that only the credit manager or a trusted lieutenant may use the telephone in connection with the collection of accounts. Goodwill that has taken years to build may be destroyed in a few minutes by an impatient message sent over the wire to a customer by an injudicious employee.

**Advantages.**—Under proper safeguards, however, the telephone method is so effective that its use for collection purposes is expanding very rapidly. The telephone gives the credit manager quick, direct, and personal access to the debtor. Complications that could be cleared up only by days, or even weeks, of letter-writing may be smoothed out over the wire in a few minutes' time. Statements that may appear cold or querulous in the black and white of a typewritten communication lose much of their harshness if carried by a friendly voice over the telephone.

**Comparative Costs.**—One reason for the increased use of the telephone in collection work is the discovery that letters cost considerably more than we used to think they did. Modern cost accounting has shown that instead of five or ten cents, the average cost is now from 25 to 35 cents a letter. Local telephone calls are, of course, considerably less than this. A wholesaler whose customers are chiefly local or suburban retailers can cover a large proportion of his delinquent accounts by telephone at an expense appreciably less than the cost of sending letters to the same customers.

**A Survey of Telephone Collection Practice.**—The National Association of Credit Men has recently completed a survey of the experiences of nearly 1,200 members on collections by telephone. It was found that only 2 per cent of this group discouraged the use of this method of effecting collections. The study reveals that the most common uses of telephone calls were (1) to press overdue accounts, (2) to find out the financial status of clients, (3) to speed up ordinary receipts, (4) to deny or change the usual credit terms, and (5) to clear up discount troubles.

Among the reasons given for using this type of communication in collection work are that it saves time, permits personal contact, is generally more effective, and saves effort or expense.

In answer to the question, "Can you recall any particularly good examples of the value of long distance in dealing with collection problems," the following are typical:

Just recently a chain store, which usually discounted, ran three months slow. I called the manager on the telephone and discovered that he had been holding up our invoices. Since then payments have been coming through regularly.

The General Purchasing Agent of a coal company office 250 miles away was holding up letters and telegrams from us to the Treasurer. After calling the Treasurer personally the next day, we got a satisfactory payment.

I telephoned a concern and collected a \$700 account, and also reached an understanding with the Treasurer that enabled us to continue selling him. He gave me information that he would not write which proved that the delayed payments were caused by a temporary

condition. Many other manufacturers had made the mistake of refusing him further credit.

An account, 6 months past due, failed to respond to letters, etc. A long distance call was made on Tuesday, saying that we had to have \$1,000 to meet Saturday's payroll. A check was received the following morning.

One of our customers was getting too slow. We talked with him over long distance. The personal contact did the trick, after vainly trying letter after letter.

A telephone call promptly brought an amount exceeding \$15,000 to our office on an account that was past due.

Last week, as a result of a long-distance call, we received a check for \$5,000 on a past-due account.

We have one customer who seems to disregard all "duns," but will respond immediately to a long-distance telephone call.

Only a short time ago we collected \$299.50 on an account that we were about to place with an attorney. A telephone conversation got the check.

The debtor was touchy about letters which, of course, could not answer his arguments. By telephoning him we had the opportunity to do this, and by appealing to his sense of fair play he cheerfully remitted. If we had depended on letters alone the account would eventually have gone to an attorney and we would have lost a customer.

We were disturbed over the slow trend of an interstate freight-trucking line but didn't wish to sacrifice future business by a declaration of immediate needs. The account totaled several hundred dollars monthly. A long distance call collected the money to salvage the account.

We collected an account by telephone after a five-minute conversation. Cost about 85 cents—collected \$850. This would have required a 360-mile drive, a full day's time and costs of about \$15 with no better results.

**Curbing the Noise Nuisance.**—Objection is sometimes made to the telephone method on the ground that it is "too noisy." The question of noise in a business office is possibly open to debate. Some office managers feel that too much quiet is as bad as too much noise; that a moderate amount of the clicking of typewriters and adding machines contributes

to a "busy feeling" and has, on the whole, a helpful effect on the office force. In the opinion of the credit manager of a large cotton mill, "the noise that is most irritating is the loud, bawling telephone conversation." To meet this objection, he has put in a booth for long-distance telephone calls, and has thus found a satisfactory solution to the problem. Other concerns have found that by discussing this problem with the telephone company some means of overcoming this situation may be found very easily.

**Collections by Telegraph.**—While the use of telegrams lacks the direct personal or "semi-personal" touch of the telephone conversation, it has certain advantages to which credit managers are responding in rapidly increasing numbers. It is short and to the point; its vigorous impact commands immediate attention; and it gives the recipient a mental jolt which usually spurs him on to action.

Extreme care must, of course, be exercised in the framing of the message. Threats or statements which might be held libelous must be avoided. The credit manager has, however, considerable latitude in the matter, and is disposed to accept at face value the widely circulated slogan: "Telegrams are legal everywhere."

The following suggested forms, provided by the Western Union Telegraph Company, indicate a variety of collection situations which may be covered by a message of ten words or less:

1. YOUR PROMPT REMITTANCE WILL ASSIST US GREATLY. PLEASE FORWARD TODAY.
2. REMITTANCE FOR OUR INVOICE OF (DATE) WILL BE APPRECIATED.
3. YOUR ACCOUNT OVERDUE. WILL APPRECIATE REMITTANCE.
4. YOU HAVE PROBABLY OVERLOOKED OUTSTANDING ACCOUNT. KINDLY FAVOR WITH REMITTANCE.
5. HAVE BEEN VERY PATIENT. WON'T YOU KINDLY REMIT. URGENT.
6. CLOSING BOOKS FOR AUDIT. PLEASE OBLIGE WITH REMITTANCE.
7. TODAY LAST DAY TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF CASH DISCOUNT.
8. WHEN MAY WE DEPEND ON REMITTANCE ASKED FOR? SECOND REMINDER.
9. VERY IMPORTANT REMITTANCE REACH US BY (DATE). ASK YOUR COOPERATION.
10. PLEASE MAIL CHECK IMMEDIATELY FOR PAST DUE ACCOUNT. THANK YOU.

11. WILL DRAW ON YOU (DAY) UNLESS WE RECEIVE REMITTANCE IMMEDIATELY.
12. MUST TAKE SHARP ACTION IF REMITTANCE NOT RECEIVED AT ONCE.
13. NECESSARY PAY PART ACCOUNT. FURTHER DELAY IMPOSSIBLE. TELEGRAPH AMOUNT TODAY.
14. ATTENTION PAST DUE ACCOUNT IMPERATIVE. DISLIKE TO TAKE FURTHER ACTION.
15. LAST CHANCE MAKE GOOD. WIRE REMITTANCE TODAY.
16. CONDITION YOUR ACCOUNT NOT CONDUCTIVE TOWARD GIVING FAVORABLE CREDIT REFERENCE.

**Cost of Telegraphic Collections.**—The expense of collecting by telegraph is reported by credit managers in various lines of business as follows:

Machinery manufacturing: a little over 1%  
 Radio supplies: less than 1%  
 Wooden ware: less than 1/2 of 1%  
 Tires and rubber: less than 1/3 of 1%  
 Automotive supplies: less than 3/10 of 1%  
 Trade associations: a little over 1/5 of 1%

**Results of 20 Telegrams.**—In order to test the efficiency of the telegraphic method the Utica Knife and Razor Company selected at random 20 accounts on which telegrams had been sent, and the results were found to be as follows:

4 paid within 1 week after first telegram was sent  
 3 paid within 2 weeks after first telegram was sent  
 4 paid within 3 weeks after first telegram was sent  
 2 paid within 1 week after second telegram was sent  
 2 paid within 2 weeks after second telegram was sent  
 3 paid within 3 weeks after second telegram was sent  
 1 disputed account, claiming additional credit  
 1 unpaid and placed with attorney for collection

---

20

This company instructs its branches to use two telegrams on each delinquent account. It reports that "the second telegram seems to wake up those who were not concerned over the mild message in the first."

**Other Results.**—The series of three telegrams given below has been most effective when used by department stores to col-

lect delinquent accounts after less forceful tactics have failed. The three are sent in one day. By using Serial Service, the store sends all three telegrams for one-fifth more than the cost of one 50-word day letter.

IMPERATIVE YOU MAKE ADJUSTMENT YOUR ACCOUNT BY ELEVEN O'CLOCK TODAY.

---

WHEN MAY WE DEPEND ON REMITTANCE REQUESTED. WILL NOT TOLERATE FURTHER DELAY. SECOND NOTICE TODAY.

---

WE HAVE BEEN PATIENT. DISLIKE TO TAKE FURTHER ACTION. YOUR FINAL CHANCE TO MAKE GOOD.

"Our experience," Dartnell Service quotes one company as saying, "has been that we will receive approximately 50 per cent response by wire to the first telegram; half of the remainder will respond to the second wire sent the same day, and where three wires are sent the same day, we received some kind of response in almost every case."

Another company is quoted as saying their collection expense in a broad use of telegrams did not run over 1 per cent of the accounts as compared with the usual rate of 15 per cent through other collection methods. Still another gave the information that in many cases an account is paid after the second and third telegrams are sent, and pointed out the large saving in collection costs.

**Telegraph Company Cooperation.**—The telegraph companies make a special point of suggesting to credit managers the various ways in which telegrams may be used in collection work. A printed copy of the list of 16 short forms reproduced in this chapter may be had on application at any Western Union Office.

## CHAPTER 20

### SYSTEM FOR A COLLECTION DEPARTMENT

**The Value of System.**—A good system, well maintained and lived up to, will go further than any other one thing to insure good collections. On the other hand, no matter how broadminded and capable the members of the credit and collection department, their efforts will go for naught without a good system.

The force of habit is utterly lost as an ally to the creditor unless the customer receives his statements and letters promptly and regularly. If mistakes or irregularities occur, the prestige of the house, that vital asset in enforcing payment, suffers in the customer's eyes; he feels that he has a right to be lax since the members of the organization have made errors, and where they have taken an inch, he considers himself privileged to take an ell. Resale arguments lose their power when addressed to a man who is thinking, "You can't depend on those people. Half the time they send out their bills late, and then they jump on you for being late yourself." Plenty of customers willingly exaggerate small errors, and what is worse, claim them when they do not exist. It is hard to preach virtue when you set a bad example.

**Reasons for Differences in Systems.**—The nature of systems varies, even in firms with similar problems to meet. It varies still more in firms of different types. The number of accounts, the size of accounts, the frequency with which customers buy, the nature of the customers, all require differences in system. A manufacturer doing a business of \$30,000,000, with average individual charges of \$150; a jobber with 65,000 live accounts, many of whom are buying every day or even several times a day, and with average charges of \$30; a manufacturer with only jobber accounts, or one selling to both

jobbers and retailers, or one selling direct only, will have different requirements in the way of office organization. Here is a house producing an exclusive specialty, with novelty features, an article that turns itself ten times a year, and that by its nature must be bought "short" lest it spoil on the dealer's hands. Terms are 30 days net, and are rigidly enforced. Over 50,000 jobbers and retailers carry the goods. The system of this manufacturer will be one thing; quite another will be that of a publisher selling a high-priced set of books to the general public, on instalments that run for two years. Is the article a piece of machinery, costing a thousand dollars and sold to highly responsible purchasers in a limited territory? Or is it an assortment of low-priced watches, sold to all manner of retailers, both small and large, from Maine to California? The office problems of the two concerns will certainly not be the same, any more than the salesman's problems, the credit man's problems, or the terms, or the procedure for enforcing them.

But the various types of business can learn from each other. The instalment house, its wits sharpened by its unusual credit risk, has worked out ideas that can be adopted by the manufacturer of expensive machinery. The machinery manufacturer, with so few accounts to handle that he requires only part of the time of one man to manage them, finds that this man has almost time enough left to take care of another duty also. Consequently he devises methods that simplify the collection task still further and these methods may be utilized equally well by the big jobber, who as a result reduces his office force from nineteen to sixteen.

The cost of the collection department is not wholly a matter of salaries and time. Adding an assistant may be cheaper than dropping one, if it produces fewer mistakes and delays. Employing higher-priced help may be an economy. Saving at the spigot and wasting at the bunghole is the very mistake which a capable executive, with a vision of his business as a whole, takes care to prevent, and he is entirely willing to spend more money on salaries if he saves the amount twice over in reduced losses from bad debts, or in a lowered sales expense



due to a greater volume of repeat orders from satisfied customers.

**Wanted—A System that Works.**—A system that works, that meets the needs of the business at the lowest cost, is what every office wants. Changes in the volume of a business may require a change in system. A well-executed sales and advertising campaign may bring great numbers of new accounts on the books, and preparations have to be made to handle them. One frequently encounters an office that is swamped with work, away behind schedule, and reaping a plentiful harvest of complaints. The cause may be an aggressive sales movement, or a change in marketing policy. Thousands of accounts have to be cared for in place of a few hundred, and the credit department is called on to “grow up” to the situation overnight.

**Systems that Fail.**—An added inconvenience may turn out to be a useless expense. One house adopted a method that required an extra copying of each account, on the theory that it made reference to the account easier, and acted as a check on the other copies. In practice, however, it turned out that the expense of copying exceeded the saving of time; moreover, the clerks did not keep the new record up to date, which ruined its usefulness. In another instance a new system failed to produce estimated savings, and a recommendation was made that it be discontinued. Analysis showed, however, that all the trouble was due to faulty location of the credit files. These had been so placed that those working with them interfered with the gangway used by certain clerks; they did not like to squeeze past the credit men working at the files, and consequently “soldiered” until the passageway was clear, consuming enough time to pull the entire system down to the point of inefficiency. Relocation of the credit files and a little education of the office force set the wheels moving at the desired speed, and saved the house the amount it had estimated.

**System for the Branch Office.**—A method which works for a centralized business may fail utterly in a decentralized business. The former may require additional mechanism to

supply the lack of close contact with customers. A branch manager may know his trade so well that he gets along with half the routine that would be required by the home office in handling the same trade. On the other hand, the branch manager may toil in vain to equal, both in person and with the aid of much routine, results which a real credit genius in the home office may accomplish with little effort, despite his handicap of distance. The force of his personality and his ability to develop an intelligent and loyal staff may be such that his little finger is thicker than his subordinate's loin. One result of this situation, by the way, may be that the chief fails to realize that methods successful for himself will not avail for others, and consequently permits systems in the branch offices which will not do the work demanded of them. Or on the other hand, he may load down local offices with an excess of routine.

No system exists independent of personality. One man may be able to operate it successfully where another man cannot—and this may imply no reflection on the second man. But in general, the unresting desire for improvement which characterizes the American business man makes him willing to learn from the experience of others and to discard the objection, "My business is different." The analytic mind learns to look through detail at the underlying principle, and then asks, "Can I adapt that principle to my business?" Careful analysis, also, may disclose that the obstructions to a plan can be removed with unexpected ease.

**The Common Features of All Systems.**—Many different types of system are in use, and many houses are getting along very comfortably under an arrangement to which they have become adjusted, without bothering to ask whether it could be improved. Others feel the need of a change, but hesitate to install a method which is not entirely clear to them.

The following sections contain an outline of a few typical systems. It has seemed best to reduce all systems to the elements, and to attempt to hold these elements in mind as the central points about which the details of any system are grouped.

**Ten Necessary Operations and the System They Require.**

—It is evident that the items of system in a credit and collection department are brought into being as the result of certain necessary operations.

1. A record must be kept of charges and credits for each customer. This requires a ledger, in either book or card form.

2. When an order is received, the credit man must either pass it for credit, hold it pending investigation, or refuse it. If from an established customer, he will be obliged to look up the present state of the account, and if this is not satisfactory, or if special caution is needed, he must look up credit information obtained from other sources. If the order comes from a new customer, he must secure information as a basis for granting or refusing credit, and must file this information for future reference.

These operations will require either access to the ledger, or to a transcript of all or part of the ledger record, which is kept in a separate file; also a file of credit information, including letters, salesmen's reports, etc.

3. Invoices must be made out in duplicate on shipment of orders, and the duplicate filed. This requires an invoice file.

4. Correspondence from all departments, either originals or copies, relating to the customer, must be filed together under a separate heading, so that a central place exists to which all questions regarding house relations with that customer can be referred. This requires a central correspondence file.

5. When a bill becomes due, that fact must be known at a definite time and the customer notified. This requires regular access to the ledger on the part of some one charged with collection duties, or access to another file containing ledger information.

6. If the bill is not paid within a given time, further steps in collection must be taken at regular intervals in an advancing series. This requires either examination of the ledger at regular intervals, or a maturity file for follow-up purposes, or both.

7. The sales department must be informed of the relation of the customer's indebtedness to his credit limit, and of changes in his credit rating, so as to be guided in selling to him. This

requires systematic memoranda to the sales department on doubtful accounts, and memoranda from the sales department to the salesmen.

8. Payments made must be known to the credit man so that he will stop the collection routine and not continue to press for payment of an account already paid. This requires absolute certainty in recording payments instantly in the ledger and in any other file bearing ledger information, and reference to this record before taking the next step in collection.

9. Claims affecting the payment of certain items must likewise be known to the credit man so that he will not press for payment of an account which is in process of adjustment, but will press for payment if the adjustment is refused. This requires systematic memoranda to and from the claim department regarding claims and adjustments.

10. After the preliminary steps in the collection routine have been taken, if payment is not made, it may be necessary to consult the record of account and the file of credit information to guide the judgment of the department as to what steps should next be taken. This requires access to the ledger or other record of account, by the member of the organization to whom these later steps are entrusted.

**Six Items of Equipment.**—It will be seen that the necessities of any system are (1) a ledger, (2) a file of credit information, (3) an invoice file, and (4) a correspondence file. Optional items are (5) a file with a transcript—complete or partial—of ledger information, and (6) a special maturity file. For conducting the follow-up any one of these six may be used, though some are in general preferred to others.

In nearly every organization it is advisable to reduce the earlier steps in collection to a routine which can be carried on by the bookkeeper or a collection clerk, while only the later steps or difficult cases come to the attention of the credit department, which thus has its hands free for matters requiring special judgment. This division of labor must be reduced to a schedule and rigidly maintained, so that the duties of each member of the organization are perfectly clear, and accounts

pass from the hands of the bookkeeper at a specified stage in the routine, into the hands of the collection department or the credit department, as the case may be.

The *record of account*, the *follow-up system*, and the *division of labor*, are the three fundamental necessities of any collection system.

Since the problems of collection systems arise in connection with each of the ten operations outlined in the foregoing section, as well as with the six items of equipment just mentioned, they will be taken up in that fashion.

**Solving the Big Problems.**—The thousand variations in system which men work out in practice usually arise in the effort to solve a few chief problems. If you should walk into an up-to-date office and inquire why they do things in a certain way, the chances favor your finding the cause in one of four matters.

First, does the use of the ledger by credit and collection men interfere too much with the bookkeepers or are the ledgers too far away for easy consultation? If so, *another file* must be established for their reference.

Second, can members of the department get along without referring to *several files* each time guidance is sought from the records? In this effort the office may have devised some means of assembling various records in a single book or file, or at least in one place.

Third, in order to care for volume of business, cannot some short cuts be adopted to reduce the *number of times* the files are consulted, without destroying the safeguards surrounding the procedure of collection?

Fourth, since most customers pay without requiring special attention, how can an *inexpensive routine* be adopted to take care of the great majority of accounts, and how much of the whole procedure can be converted into routine; how can we reach that ideal of a routine that cares for nearly every step, but which is constantly supervised and administered by intelligence? This is largely a question of the division of labor between subordinates and superiors, but partly also a question of the wise use of forms.

Incidentally, the danger of the last situation is that all the energy of high-salaried and capable men may be spent with the least profitable and deserving class of trade, while no constructive work is spent on the best class.

**The Record of Account—The Ledger.**—The ledger is the final authority on the state of the customer's account. Every care must be taken to make it complete, accurate, and up-to-date. Some of the best credit men are accustomed to use no other record in handling all credit and collection correspondence. They say that with the ledger before them they know all they need to know, and can interpret at a glance the whole history of the account, and can determine how to treat it. Some even attach tissues of the correspondence to the ledger sheet. They point out that the ledger is the original record, and that the more one depends on originals and the less on copies, the less chance of mistakes; for a copy of an original is twice as likely to be wrong, and a copy of a copy is four times as likely to be wrong. The ledger, they say, is the easiest record to keep up to date, for in case a department is crowded with work, the extra copying is likely to be postponed. If several persons need to refer occasionally to the account, perhaps coming from other departments, they can always find the ledger with the least trouble, and should be able to read the whole story there.

Whether or not it is used as the sole record of account, the ledger is the chief record. The top of the sheet should contain credit data, consisting of the credit limit assigned, and the agency ratings. It should be kept so as always to show at a glance the present balance, without figuring credits from debits to find the customer's indebtedness. It may contain space for a star or a check mark to indicate special caution; and space for notes on the customer's habits of payment, whether good pay, slow pay, or poor pay, his attitude toward drafts, etc.

If the follow-up is to be conducted from the ledger, across the top of the sheet may be printed the days of the month, to be marked by a signal tag to show the day on which the



account is to receive attention. There will also be a column for notations to indicate what steps in the collection routine have been taken, and the date. Thus S 3/27—R 4/5—DL 4/16—D 4/26 opposite an item would show that a statement had been sent March 27, a reminder April 5, a draft letter—warning of a draft—April 16, followed by a draft April 26. A series of symbols to fit the procedure of the office is easily established.

The ledger card employed by a house selling goods on the instalment plan is reproduced in Figure 14 as an example of the special forms required by those houses which have an unusual credit problem.

**The Record of Account—Collection Cards.**—For greater convenience the collection record may be transcribed on a card with entries for credit rating, personal experience, etc., and spaces to show the handling of each item on the account. Symbols may be placed in these to indicate the statement, letters, drafts, etc., issued in connection with any item. The follow-up can easily be conducted from this card by having the days of the month printed across the top and a signal tab used to indicate the dates on which attention is next to be given the account. Forms for this purpose will be submitted by any prominent supply house, or special forms can be devised on consultation with the representative of such a house. The collection man with an unusual credit risk, and consequently an unusual collection problem, will require more than the ordinary form.

**The Credit File.**—Credit information is commonly kept in a separate file, the folders being preferably of letter size so as to include correspondence from salesmen, from references, and from the customer direct, as well as salesmen's reports, etc.

One good form for such a folder contains along the tab the name, address, town, state, and business of the customer, and the name of the salesman. On the face of the folder is a ledger transcript showing agency rating, credit limit, amount sold each month, while on the edge of the folder above this





are printed the days of the month for follow-up purposes, though in practice the follow-up is seldom conducted from it. The face of the folder can be used for recording the various items of credit information in spaces labeled for the purpose.

To avoid unnecessary consultation of this file the credit man makes frequent use of the brief credit references on the ledger sheet or the collection card; or provides a special credit card like the sample shown in Figure 15.

This is especially useful where the volume of accounts is large. Thus many orders can be passed on the salesman's recommendation or from the credit man's general knowledge of the account; others can be passed after reference to the credit card; doubtful accounts will require reference to the complete file of credit information and to the ledger as well; while as a further step special inquiries may be addressed to the agencies, other members of the trade, the credit clearing house, etc. It is common practice, especially with large accounts, for the credit man to spend some time each month in familiarizing himself with the state of his accounts.

**The Invoice File.**—Since the invoice file is a necessary part of the office equipment it is sometimes used for follow-up purposes. Being printed on thin stock, however, the invoices are difficult to handle and when orders are numerous, confusion sometimes results from employing this method. Duplicate invoices, however, struck off at the same time as the original, and placed in a special maturity file or tickler provide an excellent means of follow-up.

**The Correspondence File.**—A small business with few accounts can conceivably use the general correspondence file for follow-up purposes; but even here it is not a desirable method. The collection man may mark on a slip the number of the customer's folder and the date on which attention is next desired, and file this in his personal tickler; then when the due date has been reached, he hands the slip to a filing clerk who brings out the customer's folder. The collection man then ascertains what step has been taken and decides what letter should next be

written. This is, however, a clumsy method, lays a great burden on the filing clerk, and necessitates looking through a mass of correspondence most of which is not pertinent to the credit man's desires. Extra carbon copies of correspondence may be kept in a personal maturity file, when a better method has not been devised. Carbons can be made in triplicate; one goes to the salesman, one to the general correspondence file, and one to the credit man's maturity file, described in the next section.

The credit department's correspondence file will contain a carbon copy of every letter relating to that department. To employ this file for the follow-up it is only necessary to mark in blue pencil on the top of the carbon copy the date when, according to schedule, attention is next to be given the account, and to place the sheet in a folder marked with a division of the alphabet. As will be seen this presupposes that the volume of collection correspondence is small. Each morning a clerk goes through the file taking out the sheets marked for attention on that day. These are brought to the credit man who writes the next letter required and attaches the carbon to the previous sheet, marking it again ten days ahead. Thus, at the time of writing the letter the credit man has under his eye all the correspondence relating to the case.

**A Ledger Correspondence Folder.**—A unique device for showing at a glance the correspondence and the ledger record useful in handling a large volume of accounts, is a ledger correspondence folder used in the credit department of a large eastern varnish company. This is a blue folder of the size of the ledger sheet and similarly cut. Across the top are printed the days in the month. An opening is cut in the face of the folder. All preliminary credit correspondence of customers is handled by means of numbered forms individually typed. The carbon copy is marked in blue pencil at the top with the key number, and the copy is put in the folder in such a manner that the key number is visible through the opening. The follow-up is conducted by means of tabs at the top of the ledger sheet. Thus when the case comes to the credit man, he sees at a glance the customer's ledger record

and the key number of the last letter written. Where special letters have been dictated, the carbon copies are also in the folder. The thin tissues do not bulk largely in the ledger.

**The Personal Maturity File.**—Some form of the personal maturity file or special tickler file is the most generally satisfactory for follow-up purposes in connection with collection correspondence. This may be a file drawer in the collection man's desk containing either one, two or three sets of folders, each numbered from 1 to 31. At the time of shipment a duplicate invoice is marked with the date on which the invoice next comes up for attention, say ten days ahead, and placed in the folder bearing the number of that day. On each day of the month the collection man takes out the folder numbered for that day, inquires in each case whether payment has been received, writes the letter required, makes notation of that fact on the invoice together with the day on which attention is next required, and places it ahead in the appropriate folder. A good plan is to attach to the invoice a carbon copy of this letter and of all subsequent correspondence until the account is paid.

The tickler memorandum may be a statement or other form of slip, instead of a duplicate invoice.

If the follow-up is conducted by means of a combination of the ledger examination method and the personal maturity-file method, the ledger clerk will go through a portion of the ledgers as part of his daily prescribed routine. When an account is due, he will issue a statement and note this fact opposite the entry in the ledger together with the date. He will continue to issue statements and form letters until, according to the prescribed routine of the department, the case should pass to the hands of the credit man, at which time he may send him a memorandum or a statement or carbon copies of correspondence; this will be placed in the tickler file and treated as above.

## CHAPTER 21

### SPECIAL PROBLEMS AND CASES

**Elasticity in the System.**—No hard-and-fast system can possibly take care of every problem that arises. That there is “an exception to every rule” is as true in collection work as in other departments of business activity. The preceding chapter outlined the “run-of-the-mine” objectives of collection procedure and the means used in well organized and equipped credit departments to accomplish the desired results. The present chapter is devoted to special problems and devices, and the handling of cases which do not fit into the ordinary collection routine.

**The “Master Sheet” Method.**—A New York jobber at one time made out a “master sheet” covering the orders of each day. Each line on the sheet contained a space for the invoice number, name and address of the customer, and collection notations. This sheet was then placed in a maturity file and treated like a duplicate invoice, entries being crossed off as fast as payment was made. Thus all invoices requiring attention on the one day came up to the credit man together.

**Relation to the Claim Department.**—Great care must be taken to insure that items being made the subject of claim by the customer are not pressed for collection until disallowed by the claim department. By a regular series of memoranda, this department must keep the credit department informed of progress on these items. Suppose the credit department is following up an account on a ten days’ schedule. If an item is in the hands of the claim department, the collection man may note this on the sheet with blue pencil or attach a special memorandum or paste on a colored sticker. In ten days, when the account is next reached, he may advance it another ten days in the tickler, without inquiring of the claim department, but when

the second interval has elapsed, he sends a memo to jog the claim department's memory. When claims are long drawn out and for large amounts, it is sometimes the practice to charge them off the books and against the claim department ledger. The claim department thereafter assumes responsibility for adjustment or collection of the amount; but if after a reasonable time, its efforts are unsuccessful, the charge is re-entered on the customer's account, all papers are transferred to the collection department, and the matter is taken care of by the collection manager. Very small claims are granted by the bookkeeper; claims of medium size are referred to the claim department, but not charged to their ledger.

**The Interval Between Steps.**—The amount of time a collection man allows to elapse between sending out his various statements, letters, etc., will depend on two factors: first, whether the customer is expected to reply immediately on receipt of the letter, and second, what is his distance from the creditor. Small amounts can easily be paid on the same day on which the communication is received; large amounts may require a little more time. The keen and efficient collection man for a well-known publisher, for example, has made up his mind that fifteen days is the proper interval; ten days he has found did not give time for a reply, while eighteen or twenty was so long a time that the customer overlooked the account because he was not reminded often enough. On the other hand, an interval of a week or ten days has great advantage in dividing time into natural periods, thus making the debtor realize the regularity with which he is being followed up, and appealing to his sense of habit as an aid in payment. It is easier to figure from the 2nd to the 12th of the month or from one Tuesday to the next than to make a mental estimate of any other interval less than a month. Let it not be thought that this point is unimportant; if the debtor can form a definite visual image of the day on which payment is required, this will act as a powerful stimulus. It is better to say "Failing to hear from you by May 15 we will draw," than to say, "Failing to hear from you in ten days we will draw."

A reasonable mailing schedule should be established to cover all points with which a house does business. The following schedule is in use by a New York company having customers in every quarter of the globe.

#### MAILING SCHEDULE

As the name implies, this schedule is for the purpose of gaging the time necessary for a customer's reply to reach us. If a man lives in New York City it will naturally take less time than if he lives somewhere on the Pacific Coast. For instance, we should expect a reply to any of our forms when sent to a subscriber in the city within five or six days at the utmost; while from a subscriber in San Francisco we should not expect a reply in less than ten days at the minimum.

It is very important that the schedule outlined below be strictly followed and the bills and forms mailed promptly on the dates due. A delay of one or two days with each form equals an entire week at the completion of the series of letters and might mean the delaying of the payment or even in some extreme cases the loss of an account.

The following states are allowed *six days* interval between forms:

Connecticut	Ohio
Delaware	Pennsylvania
Illinois	Rhode Island
Maine	Vermont
Maryland	Virginia
Massachusetts	Washington, D. C.
New Hampshire	West Virginia
New Jersey	Wisconsin
New York	

*Seven days* for Eastern Canada, including Manitoba, Quebec, and Ontario.

*Eight days* for:

Alabama	Minnesota
Arkansas	Mississippi
Florida	Missouri
Georgia	Nebraska
Indiana	North Carolina
Iowa	North Dakota
Kansas	Oklahoma
Kentucky	South Carolina
Louisiana	South Dakota
Michigan	Tennessee

*Nine days* for communications to:

Colorado	Texas
Idaho	Utah
Montana	Wyoming
New Mexico	

*Ten days* for Arizona.

*Eleven days* for:

California.	Nevada
Oregon	Washington

*Sixteen days* for Mexico.

*Twenty days* for subscribers in Panama and the Canal Zone.

*Twenty-two days* for Alaska, Cuba, and Egypt.

*Thirty days* for Hawaii and the Philippine Islands.

*Six weeks* for communications to China and Japan.

One essential point always to keep in mind in connection with this schedule is that the Second Request is sent out *two days after* the payment is due in this office and that the subscriber is allowed *two days longer* than the mailing schedule calls for before drawing a draft on him.

Here is a model to be followed for payments due on the first of the month and which have an eight-day interval for follow-ups:

Form	Date Sent
Statement	22nd
2nd request	3rd
1st letter	11th
2nd letter	19th
3rd letter	27th
Draft	6th

*All members of the Collection Department should read this schedule carefully so as to become well acquainted with the mailing intervals for the various places where we have customers.*

**Specifications for Department Routine.**—Every item in the department routine including the duties of each member of the department should be outlined in detail and placed in a folder of which each member has a copy. If forms are employed, a loose-leaf book of these with an index, showing key number and nature of each letter, should be in the possession



of each individual issuing letters. The same is true if a form-paragraph book is used. The outlined routine should be as simple as possible and the duties of each department member recorded on separate sheets so as to be easily grasped.

**Schedule for Ledger Examination.**—The routine adopted by a jobber carrying 50,000 live accounts involves the division of ledgers according to territory and the subdivision of each ledger into ten sections. Each day the bookkeeper goes through one of these sections, thus covering his ledgers in ten days.

Ten days before a bill falls due, statement is made out and sent to the customer with a sticker attached, reading, "This bill is only a memorandum. It is *not yet due*." In ten days, if the account is not yet paid, a second statement is issued with a paster attached. At the end of the third ten days, a statement is made out in red ink and mailed to the credit department where it remains in a tickler file. Notations of each step taken thereafter are made on it and copies of all letters attached to it. A multigraphed letter is sent out as the first collection letter signed by the collection manager in ink, and is followed in ten days by three individually typed forms, the last of which is an attorney letter. Thus in the thirty days, the account has passed to the credit department and in sixty days has gone to an attorney and has been charged off.

Petty items charged to the claim department are noted on the ledger opposite the account, "C. D.," and the date. A house letter is then written the claim department asking them to make adjustment. On going through the ledger, the bookkeeper makes a special memorandum of such items and brings them to the credit manager. He instructs him to make out a statement covering items not in dispute, and also *writes the customer*, saying the claim department has not adjusted certain items, but asking payment of the balance. This prevents the customer from withholding payment entirely.

Every statement or letter sent the customer is noted opposite the item in the ledger, form letters being shown by their key number, specially dictated letters by the symbol, "L." If an extension is asked, for instance, till August 25, the symbol will

read "Ex/8/25" and a copy of the letter granting the extension is set forward to August 26 in the personal maturity file, a day being allowed for receipt of the letter. But the account will come up for attention through ledger examination or through the red ink statement in the maturity file, perhaps on August 11; then reference will be made back to the ledger to see if payment has come in, and this will disclose the fact that an extension has been granted until the 25th. The red ink statement is thereupon destroyed, and no attention is paid the account until the copy of the letter granting the extension comes up for attention on August 26.

A manufacturer handling a large number of small sales makes out on the billing machine, at the time the order is received, seven copies of the invoice simultaneously. They consist of (1) a ledger card, (2) a geographical file slip, (3) a label slip which is perforated lengthwise through the center, the upper half only being used as it contains the name and address of the customer, three invoices on (4) white, (5) blue, and (6) pink paper, and (7) a master slip for the collection department. Each copy carries the same invoice number. The ledger card and invoices are filed numerically. The geographical file slip is filed geographically for cross reference purposes. The master slip is filed in a maturity file fifteen days ahead of the date on which the goods are shipped. The original (the white invoice) is sent the day the order is received, irrespective of the shipping date. At the expiration of the fifteen days the master slip is compared with the ledger card, and if the account is unpaid a reminder sticker is attached to the blue invoice and this is sent to the customer, the master slip being filed ahead fifteen days. In another fifteen days, if the account has not been paid, the pink invoice with the second reminder sticker is issued, and fifteen days later, if still unpaid, a form letter individually typed is issued with a statement. If not paid, other forms follow at fifteen-day intervals, each noted on the master slip. At the expiration of ninety days the account is charged to profit and loss and referred to a collection agency. If subsequently paid it is recovered from the profit and loss account.

**Avoiding Unnecessary Communications.**—Every effort should be made to avoid needless interdepartment communication, but rather to analyze precisely what system is necessary, to establish this in written form, and to maintain it rigidly. When payment is made by check, whether in the wholesale or the retail business, it is usually unnecessary to send a receipt. A voucher check may be employed by the person making payment; or the seller may issue as part of the invoice a stub to be detached and retained by the customer as evidence of payment. It is good practice to print at the foot of statement or invoice a sentence like the following, "In accordance with a growing commercial practice, where payment is made by check, a receipt will not be sent."

**Collection Costs.**—In the concluding paragraph of Chapter 1 it was suggested that the credit manager should be "something of a cost accountant," knowing just what expense is involved in each stage of the collection process.

Discerning business executives are rapidly coming to believe that many attempts to reduce credit and collection department costs in the past have attacked the problem at the wrong point. Salaries have been reduced, office space restricted, and the issue of supplies and stationery put on a starvation basis. But the effect of all this may have been to slow up collection turnover and thus cause a loss to the concern of far more than was saved by reducing the items of overhead expense.

The thing that should be watched by the executive officers is the *cost of carrying accounts*. The trouble may be, not that the concern is paying too much for a credit manager, but that it is not paying enough. A higher-salaried, more vigorous and resourceful manager might improve collection turnover to such an extent that the increased profits to the enterprise would greatly exceed the extra amount paid to him in salary.

The same is true of the other overhead items. Good credit and collection work cannot be done in restricted quarters, or with niggardly appropriations for equipment and supplies. A fair expenditure for these items will come back many times in actual cash, to say nothing of the value of increased goodwill.

**"Tracer" Letters.**—It frequently happens that the collection process is blocked or slowed up by some action or inaction that may not be the fault of the debtor. In such cases it is

*(Small balances)*

Gentlemen:

Balance \$ .....

The small balance indicated above is not explained by any information in our files.

If we have neglected to credit your account properly we shall be only too happy to do so if you will assist us with a complete explanation.

In the event a further investigation develops that the amount is due us, we shall appreciate your early remittance.

Thank you.

---

*(Bank tracer)*

Gentlemen:

Under date of . . . . . we mailed you a sight draft and original bill of lading on . . . . . for \$ . . . . .

To date we have received no information concerning this item, and are writing to ascertain just what has been done toward handling it.

If the draft is still unpaid, please notify us by return mail so that we may furnish disposition of this shipment.

Very truly yours,

---

*(Postmaster tracer)*

Postmaster

..... (City)  
 ..... (State)

Dear Sir:

C. O. D. No. ....

Under date of . . . . . we made a C. O. D. shipment in the amount of \$ . . . . . to . . . . . of . . . . .

Before taking up this matter with the postmaster here in Kansas City, we are writing you in hope that you will furnish us the necessary information concerning the shipment.

If this shipment has been taken up, kindly reimburse us. If not, please advise us by return mail so that we may make disposition of the shipment.

Yours very truly,

wise to *get the facts* before putting on additional collection pressure. Three letters for this purpose, developed by the credit department of the H. T. Poindexter Merchandise Company of Kansas City, are given on the preceding page.

**Handling the Discount Pirate.**—The habitual grabber of unearned discounts must be treated as a special case outside of the routine collection program. In Chapter 10 on “Constructive Credit Policies” there was reproduced a letter used by a shoe manufacturing concern in connection with a discount piracy case. Here is another, developed and used with good effect:

Gentlemen:

Thank you for your check No. . . . . remitted to clear invoice of \$ . . . . . from which remittance discount is deducted.

The question of cash discount is considerably discussed nowadays.

A discount for cash is a very different thing from the old trade discount. The former is held out as an inducement to pay within a specified date as part of the policy to produce funds to run a business. Unless it is carefully guarded and the terms strictly enforced the deduction of discount beyond the terms defeats the purpose for which they were set up, and the practice then becomes nothing but a means by which profits can be given away very quickly.

Would it not be unfair, gentlemen, if your customers were to ask you to give them part of your profits? That is exactly what happens when you allow them to deduct discount beyond the terms laid down.

Our company has a well defined policy of one price and the same terms to everybody, by which we have succeeded in building up much respect and goodwill among the trade.

In order to be consistently able to continue to build that goodwill and respect, we believe it to be necessary to ask that all of our customers adhere to our terms of sale.

It is not, therefore, with any disinclination to do you a favor, but with a desire to further the policy of playing the game fairly with all, that we ask you to remit a check for the discount.

Very truly yours,

**Problems in Varying Lines of Business.**—Each specialized line of business activity has its own peculiar credit and collection problems, due to variations in terms, datings, seasonal

factors, and special conditions in the trade. Out of many that might be chosen, a few are selected for illustration here.

**Cement.**—The Lehigh Portland Cement Company of Allentown, Pa., provides its dealers with a 104-page book, "Credits and Collections," compiled by a number of credit managers of national reputation. This is Letter No. 2 of a series of five included in the Lehigh manual:

Dear Sir:

We want to talk about ourselves a minute. We have to work pretty hard to make a living, but we have made up our minds to get a lot of fun out of life, too.

And there is not much fun in life unless you are really friends—giving everybody a square deal. We sold you a high quality of material and you used it and got value received from it.

Before we could sell you that material, we had to buy it. We had to pay for it.

We have written you what seemed to us a perfectly fair, friendly letter asking you to treat us as fairly as we had treated you. We have been mighty surprised not to have heard from you.

But we still feel that the best way to settle this is to be square with each other and to settle this as friends. We know you feel this way too, and we know you will send us a check for \$ . . . . in the return mail.

Yours truly,

**Hardware.**—Customers of the Van Camp Hardware & Iron Company of Indianapolis are encouraged to send the com-

<b>Van Camp Hardware &amp; Iron Co.:</b>		
We give you below the key figures on our		
<b>BUSINESS CONTROL</b> for the month of . . . . .		
19 , and will appreciate any suggestions you might		
make relative to the progress shown:		
Expense	Sales	Purchases
\$	\$	\$
Signed.....		

Figure 16. Brief Form for Customer's Report

PAIRS		MOSE. ACCOUNT	REPORT NO. _____
BALANCE FROM PREVIOUS REPORT			ENDING _____
DATE AND			IN THE FAMILY DEPARTMENT.
AMOUNT OF			WEEKLY SALES SHOULD
INVOICES			EQUAL 4 PAIRS FOR
OF			EVERY 100 PAIRS IN STOCK
SHOES			OR
AND			\$40.00 AT COST FOR EVERY
FINDINGS			\$1000.00 IN THE INVENTORY
RECEIVED			
DURING			MONTHLY SALES SHOULD
PERIOD			EQUAL 25 PAIRS FOR
			EVERY 100 PAIRS IN STOCK
			OR
			\$250.00 AT COST FOR EVERY
			\$1000.00 IN THE INVENTORY
TOTAL			
LESS SHOES RET'D.			AVERAGE COST OF SHOES
SHOES & FINDINGS ON HAND			SOLD SHOULD EQUAL
LESS SALES (COST)			AVERAGE COST OF SHOES IN
BALANCE ON			THE INVENTORY
HAND NOW			
*RATE OF TURNOVER ON PAIRAGE BASIS _____		*ON BASIS OF COST PRICE _____	
†AVERAGE COST OF SHOES SOLD _____		†AVERAGE COST OF SHOES IN INVENTORY _____	
SALES OF			
		FOR PERIOD	TO DATE
	\$	%	\$
SHOES & FINDINGS (SELLING PRICE)		100%	
LESS SALES AT COST			
GROSS PROFITS			
PAIRS			
	MEN'S	BOYS' YOUTH'S LITTLE GIRLS	WORK SHOES
	WOMEN'S	MISSES	CHILD'S 51-24 81-9-11
	INF.	TENNIS RUBBERS	FELTS
ON HAND LAST REPORT			
RECEIPTS			
TOTAL			
SALES BY PAIRS			
BALANCE ON HAND			
*TURNOVER			
NAME _____			
TOWN AND STATE _____			
*TO COMPUTE ON A WEEKLY BASIS MULTIPLY SALES BY 52 AND DIVIDE BY ENDING INVENTORY. TO COMPUTE ON A MONTHLY BASIS MULTIPLY SALES BY 12 AND DIVIDE BY ENDING INVENTORY.			
†TO COMPUTE DIVIDE COST OF SALES BY NUMBER OF PAIRS SOLD			
‡TO COMPUTE DIVIDE COST OF SHOES IN STOCK BY NUMBER OF PAIRS IN STOCK			

Figure 17. Form for Weekly Report—Customer to Supplier

SALESMAN		W. E. Wilson		BANK		First National			
DUN	J 3	LYON	NAME	John Doe & Bros					
BRAD	V.D.	CREDIT	ADDRESS	Bird Center Ill.					
SPECIAL INFORMATION	COLLECTION NOTES	DATE	MOSE.	CASH	JOUR	DEBIT	CREDIT	DEBIT BALANCE	CREDIT BALANCE
Jan 31/3-		193-							
Statement signed		Mar 12	326	60	7/30	157 50	149 00		
is of 11/3-		May 1	181				8 50		
Chk 400		June 4	852	60	7/30	400 00			
acc 3500		July 3	264				3920		
Stk 2200		✓		dis			80		
6100									
dist									
9/2 1150									
Over Bank 500									
1650									
dupl 4450									
6100									
All well									
regarded as									
to character									
7 habits									
average ability									
✓ boy bet 5 good									
for moderate success									

Figure 18. Form for Combined Credit and Accounting Record



pany each month, on a mutual interest basis, a report of their volume of expense, sales, and purchases. The form (on a card), shown in Figure 16, is provided for each customer.

**Shoes.**—A more elaborate form, designed to accomplish a similar purpose, is provided by a St. Louis shoe manufacturing concern for its customers. The form, which is illustrated in Figure 17, is filled out and mailed weekly by each cooperating customer. From it the manufacturer is able to get a line on basic trends in the progress of the customer's business.

**Beds.**—The American Bed Company of St. Louis uses a 5 x 8 card which conveniently combines credit and bookkeeping records. This form is illustrated in Figure 18. The column headed "Collection Notes" is used for collection data or additional reports. The date of mailing of a statement on a matured account is entered in this column, to indicate that the account is being handled by the collection department.

**Work Clothing.**—This is one of the lines in which a more or less systematic effort is made to collect interest on past-due accounts. The following letter is used by G. S. Frank, credit manager of the Maginnis Cotton Mills:

Gentlemen:

This acknowledges receipt of your check in settlement of our invoice of June 26 less the usual 2 per cent discount, but as payment was made some three weeks after actual maturity, you should have included the accrued interest for the extra time taken.

We have, nevertheless, credited your account with this payment and the 2 per cent discount available for settlement made within 70 days, and will thank you to let us have an additional remittance for \$. . . . . to wipe out the interest charge.

Awaiting your usual prompt attention, we are

Yours very truly,

MAGINNIS COTTON MILLS  
Credit Department

## CHAPTER 22

### TYPICAL COLLECTION PROCEDURES

**Procedure of a Wholesale House.**—A certain large wholesaler of men's furnishings adopts in general the practice of issuing before the bill is due a statement without comment and stamped "Not due." This he follows by a statement without comment when the bill is due. If the customer takes a discount when not entitled to it, a leeway of a week is allowed on the assumption of error; but if more than this is taken, a letter is sent without fail. If no remittance is received within a week or ten days, a simple, courteous reminder is issued, followed after another interval by a similar letter. When the account is a month overdue it is turned over to the credit department by the bookkeeper who has been handling previous steps. Then follows a letter from the credit department, working for a reply. Part payments are frequently offered. The manager and his assistants maintain a diplomatic attitude, endeavoring to use the prestige of the house and its service to customers as a means of securing payment, without driving a debtor into a corner and handing him an ultimatum.

**Another Wholesaler's Procedure.**—The credit manager for a well-known silk firm, dealing with a somewhat different class of trade, finds it advisable to follow his second reminder with a draft, notifying the customer that this will be handed to an attorney if not paid on presentation; but in practice a certain length of time is often allowed to elapse before the attorney is actually notified to go ahead. "Suppose that when an account has run for a month and is not yet due, I receive information that makes it look hazardous. At once I stop further sale. The ordinary credit man, having decided that the account is bad, waits for his bill to mature hoping it will be paid. But I go straight up to the man and offer him an extra

discount. 'Frankly,' I say, 'I have lost confidence in you.' If the man refuses this incentive to pay, I know he is 'busted,' and then I know what to do. I never encumber my mind with affairs of that sort—I get them through with as quickly as possible—but my methods of collection are as varied as my accounts; every case needs individual treatment." The same manager testifies that 98 to 99 per cent of all business men are honest in their intention. It is only when the business man's craft has drifted into currents beyond control, and insolvency threatens, that his instinct of self-preservation gets the upper hand.

**Variant of the "House Collection Agency" Plan.**—In the credit department of a grocery wholesaler on the west coast, but one form letter is used. The company's terms call for payment by the 10th of each month for the preceding month's purchases. A statement is sent on the 1st, and customers who do not respond receive a second statement on the 15th. Some of the latter statements are sent without comment; some bear a brief hand-written notation from the credit manager; others are accompanied by specially dictated letters.

If none of these methods is successful, an "ultimatum" letter is sent, threatening collection by attorney. If this letter does not produce payment, the concern's only form letter is used. For this purpose the credit manager has provided a post-office lock box and printed letterheads for his two assistants, carrying only their names and the lock box number in the local post-office. The man handling city credits uses the letterhead of the country credit man, and the latter's signature. The country credit man uses the city man's letterhead and signature. The customer, seeing an unfamiliar name, infers that the letter he receives comes from an attorney, which is precisely the result desired.

This plan was reported to be successful in from 80 to 85 per cent of the cases in which it was used. If the form letter fails to secure payment, the account is sent to the Collection Department of the local group of the National Association of Credit Men for collection.

The letter is as follows :

Dear Sir:

Your account due the (Name of Company) has been turned over to the writer for collection.

To avoid unnecessary publicity and expense, will you please remit the sum of \$....., either to the writer at the above address or direct to the (Name of Company)?

Very truly yours,

**The Regular Use of Drafts.**—A jobber in a different line carrying fifty thousand live accounts on terms of 2-10, net 60, invariably employs a draft following the monthly statement. The statement bears on its face a notice that the draft will be sent. The draft comes up in a tickler file in a week's time, and is sent to the bookkeeper, who issues a notice to the customer and ten days thereafter forwards the notice to the bank together with notice to the customer of the step that has been taken. If the draft is refused the credit man assumes charge of the negotiation at once. As an emergency plan in dealing with a customer who will not answer letters or telegrams, the credit man writes that he is willing to wait if the customer will accept the enclosed note, but he warns the debtor that if the note or a remittance does not come he will draw immediately and will follow unhesitatingly with suit.

**A "Red Ink" Statement.**—A Middle Western jobber doing a large business with country merchants issues a statement when the bill is due on which are clearly printed the terms, net sixty days. Ten days later another statement is issued on which is printed a reminder, courteously phrased, assuming that no doubt the account has escaped the customer's attention. Ten days later another statement is issued on which is printed in red ink a courteous but urgent reminder asking why the bill has not been paid. The impersonal nature of the printed letter prevents it from giving offense, but the language employed and the color of the ink bring it strongly to the careless debtor's attention. When the account is thirty days overdue, the credit manager writes a letter designed to get a reply.

**Procedure of a Mail-Order House.**—A house doing business by mail and allowing examination of its goods sends an invoice with the goods and 15 days after a blue invoice with a sticker attached calling attention to its terms. After 30 days it sends a pink invoice, a duplicate of the preceding one, with a different sticker. Fifteen days later it sends out a statement with a simple letter containing an interesting sentence reselling the goods. Fifteen days later another letter follows with a statement; this one makes some specific appeal to pride, goodwill, etc., with a hint that further measures will be taken. Following this in some instances, a “general manager” letter is sent offering leniency and giving the customer every opportunity to reply. This is very effective in securing an answer, oftentimes revealing some dissatisfaction with the merchandise which can be straightened out in diplomatic correspondence. By this time nearly all accounts have been cleared up. But as they are not charged off the books for ninety to one hundred and twenty days, the remaining interval is utilized in communicating with the buyer’s reference.

This letter goes direct to the reference given by the customer when he ordered the goods—who is frequently the customer’s employer. He is informed that there is apparently some difficulty with the account, and is asked if he can supply information which will be of service. Needless to say, the letter is extremely courteous. This brings in forty per cent of the small number of accounts still outstanding—surely a notable success. But if no replies are received, the customer is warned that his account will be handed to an attorney. After another interval the attorney receives the papers designed to reach him on a date set in the letter to the customer. He waits three days; then proceeds to collect.

**A Manufacturer’s Procedure.**—A manufacturer of vacuum cleaners before reaching the “general manager” letter, sends a series of five communications to the delinquent retailer.

*The first letter* asks definitely for a check and assumes an oversight.

Dear Sir:

Will you kindly let us have your check for \$ . . . some time before the . . . ?

This account is now somewhat past due. We believe it must have escaped your attention and we hope you will let us have your remittance promptly.

Yours very truly,

*The second letter* assumes that the first has not been received, and appeals to pride.

Dear Sir:

Perhaps you did not get our recent letter calling your attention to your account of \$ . . . . If, for any reason, this is not due, will you please let us know? According to our records, payment is somewhat past due. We are sure that you are as desirous of keeping all obligations up to date as ourselves, and will give the matter your immediate attention.

Let us thank you in advance for your reply, which we are confident will contain a check.

Yours very truly,

*The third letter* is a little more insistent and appeals to the desire of the debtor to avoid annoyance.

Dear Sir:

You must have overlooked answering our recent letter, regarding your account of \$ . . . . You do not wish to be annoyed, nor do we desire to be insistent, regarding payment.

Surely you will agree that we are, at least, entitled to a word from you, and if there is any reason why full payment cannot be made, or is not due, just let us know. As your machine was shipped from our factory on . . . , we certainly are entitled to your prompt answer, and we believe to your check also, for which we will look.

Yours very truly,

At this stage the company decides to make a definite attempt to resell the goods, believing that it is now too late to rely primarily on the power of habit.

*The fourth letter*, consequently, appeals to self-interest, as well as to pride and the desire to avoid annoyance.

Dear Sir:

It was a pleasure for us to fill your good order for . . . . . cleaners. We knew you were buying something with which you would be more than pleased after each day of use, and we were glad to number you among our many satisfied customers.

It never occurred to us that we should be obliged to write you three letters, this being the fourth, regarding the payment of our invoice, amounting to \$ . . . . ., without receiving a reply from you.

We feel that this surely must have been overlooked in the rush of other business. If you mail your check today you will have it off your mind and we shall not have to bother you again.

Yours very truly,

*The fifth letter* relies on the appeal to pride involved in the assumption that a subordinate has been guilty of the failure to pay and that his superior officer will correct the oversight.

Dear Sir:

On referring to our records, we find that we have written you no fewer than four letters, this being the fifth, in connection with your account with us to the amount of \$ . . . . .

We believe that the matter has not been brought to the attention of the proper authorities in your company, and we would ask you to be good enough to give this bill final consideration at once. It seems impossible to believe that any firm would be so lax as to allow four letters to pass without reply, and we feel confident that this is caused by the failure on the part of some clerk to deliver the letters into proper hands.

The amount due, for which we enclose a statement, is \$ . . . . .

Yours very truly,

The "general manager" letter and a letter bearing the letter-head of their own collection agency completes the series employed by this company before the account is sent to a local attorney.

**Canadian Collection by Bank Draft.**—As is indicated above, the tendency of many houses in connection with drafts

is to accompany them by a letter which makes the delinquent debtor feel the urgency of the step. In Canada, on the other hand, drafts carry no such implication. A New York manufacturer handles nearly all his Canadian collections by draft, sending the bank a multigraphed form which reads, "Accept our thanks for your prompt attention to the enclosed draft. Please make return *direct* to us in New York Exchange—your usual collection charge." A place is left for the name of the customer, his city and province, and amounts due.

Another form sent to the customer reads, "We are today drawing for our invoice dated . . . . . through the . . . . . We hope this will be satisfactory to you. Please honor draft on presentation."

A third form is sent to the bank in case no reply is received by a certain date. "Our draft (or acceptance) has not according to our records been accepted. Will you please give it your early attention, returning draft to us at once in case the customer will not honor?"

**Procedure of a Specialty Manufacturer.**—A firm of national reputation, located in New York City, manufactures a specialty article dealt in by a great variety of retailers. Accounts are small and are handled in large volume. The manager makes use of novel and varied phrases as a means of getting attention for his collection letters.

One of his letters appeals to pride and goodwill in the following frank language:

Dear Sir:

Most collection letters have a tendency to preach promptness and its allied virtues. It's rather hard to get away from.

To be frank, we were racking our brains for some new way to put this idea across when it occurred to us you would respond to a straight-from-the-shoulder request for payment. So here it is.

Your account shows \$ . . . . . due. Let us have your check by return mail and we'll be much obliged.

Very truly yours,

CREDIT & COLLECTION DEPARTMENT



Another letter "out-guesses" the customer by telling what is probably passing in his mind. It also makes an appeal to fair play and resells credit.

Dear Sir:

You have probably received our several letters with reference to your overdue account. That a reply has not been received has been undoubtedly due to an oversight or conditions over which you have had no control. Perhaps you have been waiting until you could make remittance of the entire amount.

Meanwhile we have been wondering just why payment has not been received. Put yourself in our place. If you had a customer who persistently ignored your letters wouldn't you begin to consider taking some definite action which would uncover his reasons?

In view of our past liberality, business courtesy entitles us to a remittance or explanation by return mail.

Don't bother to write a letter. Attach your check to this letter and use the enclosed envelope.

Very truly yours,

CREDIT & COLLECTION DEPARTMENT

At the point where the account is to pass into the hands of the controller, the following appeal to fair play is used coupled with a hint of severity.

Dear Sir:

At heart most men are fair and try to maintain a reputation for fair dealing.

We are willing to make allowance for unusual circumstances, but how are we to do that if we don't know them?

To afford every opportunity for our customers to place us in touch with their reasons for nonpayment our controller has requested us to refer all delinquent accounts to him.

If we fail to hear from you in seven days your account will be referred to our controller.

Very truly yours,

CREDIT & COLLECTION DEPARTMENT

A different letter, which may be used at the same time as the preceding, begins by reselling the credit privilege.

Dear Sir:

When we shipped you the goods represented by your present account, we expressed our confidence in your willingness and your ability to pay for them on regular terms.

That you have not done so in spite of our reminders is a disappointment—particularly as we have had no information from you concerning the circumstances which make your present delinquency necessary. We are entitled to either a remittance or an explanation by return mail.

The controller has requested that all delinquent accounts be referred to him on . . . . . We hope you will make the necessary adjustment before that time.

Very truly yours,

[Signed by the firm.]

The next letter is from the controller and is an adaptation of the “general manager” letter.

Dear Sir:

The manager of our Credit and Collection Department this morning laid on my desk a dozen or so accounts which are long overdue and which he has attempted to collect by adopting liberal and lenient methods.

It being the practice of our house to extend every possible courtesy to our trade, our Collection Department is working under restriction, which prohibits taking drastic steps in the collection of a stray delinquent account. For that reason, these matters come to this office to be passed upon.

Now, however, I find that your attention has several times been called to a matter of \$ . . . . which has been standing on the books against your account longer than it should. Since our letters have not been successful in disposing of this item, I feel that we will be justified in refraining from further correspondence and in proceeding in the usual manner to collect your account.

This, I think, we ought to do unless we hear from you within the next week or ten days. Provided some word does not come from you in the meantime, I have instructed Mr. Ashe to proceed along these lines on . . . . .

Very truly yours,

.....  
CONTROLLER

The following is also a “controller” letter employing several interesting features. It begins with a story which shows how

lenient the creditor is—and desires to be. It goes on to ask the debtor to classify himself and concludes by offering temporary leniency.

Dear Sir:

The other evening after dinner I dropped into a “movie” theater and saw a picture which to me was very interesting. It depicted the difference between a doctor who is guided wholly by scientific practice and one who is scientific—but also human.

I thought of that film when Mr. Ashe, our credit manager, brought in two or three accounts to me this morning—of which yours was one—saying that they were delinquent and he was ready to proceed in the usual manner to collect them. There is a scientific and hard-and-fast way in which to collect such accounts. But we like to be human about these things.

Usually there are three reasons why an account is not paid when it is due. The man who owes the account happens to be short of cash, or he or his employees neglect it, or he intentionally lets it slide because by nature he is opposed to paying his bills when they ought to be paid.

The great majority of cases belong in the second class.

Many also belong in the first class, although just now most every dealer is well supplied with funds or should be.

Only a very few belong in the third class and these we soon discover.

Doubtless you have overlooked the account we have standing on our books against you, although, frankly, it seems a little bit hard to understand why you should not have replied to our letters on the subject. Certainly there can be no excuse for neglecting the matter after you receive this letter.

I have, therefore, asked that the customary action on your account be withheld for another week, feeling sure that now that it has been called to your attention in this special way you will take care of it immediately.

Very truly yours,

... ..

CONTROLLER

## CHAPTER 23

### COLLECTION PROCEDURE—WHOLESALE HOUSE

**A Wholesaler's Form-Letter Book.**—Handling an enormous number of comparatively small accounts and dealing with customers who order even several times a day, a wholesale house in New York City has prepared a book of form letters, a copy of which is in the possession of the credit manager and of the typist who handles this special correspondence. When provided with the index number of the letter desired and with the figures to be inserted, the typist rapidly prepares the letters each day for the credit manager's signature.

The best possible explanation of the system is given by a glance at the index of this book. As will be noted it covers such matters as the regular series to the delinquent customer, special letters on short-term goods, small bills, part payments, references, extensions, checks returned, discount, etc.

**A        STRAIGHT REQUEST FOR MONEY**

A-1      First letter after second statement.

A-2      Second letter after second statement.

A-3      Third letter, which intimates that we shall place the account with attorney if not paid.

B-1      First request on . . . . . bill—special short terms—to be followed by regular collection letters.

C-1      First request on unpaid bill for prepaid freight, to be followed by regular forms for small amounts.

**D        SMALL BILLS**

D-1      First request for payment of small bill after second statement.

D-2      Second request for payment of small bill after the second statement.

## E SMALL BALANCES

- E-1 First request for payment of small balance after second statement.
- E-2 Second request for payment of small balance after second statement.
- E-3 Third request for payment of small balance after second statement.

## F PAYMENT ON ACCOUNT

- F-1 Extending thanks for previous payment already made on account, and asking for balance.
- F-2 Acknowledging receipt of payment on account and letter, and expressing regret that his payment did not pay the entire account.
- F-3 Acknowledging payment that has been made on account after an attorney letter has been sent.

## G OUTSIDE AND REFERENCE FORMS

- G-1 Request for information from the . . . . . Trade Protective Association, and request to be enclosed with our letter.
- G-2 First letter written by Southern Association of Credit Men.
- G-3 Second letter written by Southern Association of Credit Men.
- G-4 First letter written by Northern Association of Credit Men.
- G-5 Second letter written by Northern Association of Credit Men.
- G-6 Letter written by . . . . . Mercantile Agencies.

## H EXTENSIONS

- H-1 Acknowledging payment on account and complying with the request for a specified extension on the balance
- H-2 Granting extension up to a specified time, suggesting postdated check.
- H-2½ Granting extension up to a specified time, no mention of check.
- H-3 Where customer says "I will pay as soon as possible."

## J PAYMENTS NOT MADE IN ACCORDANCE WITH EXTENSIONS GRANTED

- J-1 To be used on date extension expires.
- J-2 To be used five days or more after extension has expired.
- J-3 Customer has not lived up to his agreement to pay weekly.

## K CHECKS RETURNED UNPAID

- K-1 First letter.
- K-2 No fees.
- K-3 Second letter.
- K-4 Has made good on check, but has not sent the protest fees.
- K-5 Check has been made good in full. Returning check to customer.
- K-6 Check returned to customer not signed.
- K-7 Check returned to customer, not made out properly, difference between body and figures.
- K-8 Check returned for endorsement.
- K-9 Check returned, intended for some one else.

## L C. O. D.'s

- L-1 We have received notice that draft has not been accepted.
- L-2 Draft and bill of lading have been returned to us.

## M EXCESSIVE DEDUCTIONS FOR DISCOUNT

- M-1 Check returned for correction, deducts 2%, not entitled to any.
- M-2 Check returned for correction, deducts 2%, entitled to 1%.
- M-3 Check returned for correction, deducts 1%, not entitled to any.
- M-4 Check accepted. Deducts 2%, not entitled to any.
- M-5 Check accepted. Deducts 2%, entitled to 1%.
- M-6 Check accepted. Deducts 1%, not entitled to any.
- M-7 Check accepted, discount allowed. Deducts 2%, not entitled to any.
- M-8 Check accepted, discount allowed. Deducts 2%, entitled to 1%.
- M-9 Check accepted, discount allowed. Deducts 1%, not entitled to any.

## O LETTERS TO CLAIM DEPARTMENT

## P INSTRUCTIONS TO RECALL C. O. D. SHIPMENT, ENCLOSING ORIGINAL BILL OF LADING

Some of the foregoing letters, for instance A-1 and A-2, require constant revision and variety. Others such as A-3—which threatens an attorney—can be maintained without change as they are almost never sent to the same customer twice. In every instance, save one, the letters are individually typed. The single exception is the first of the regular series,

which is a courteous, multigraphed form, purposely given an impersonal quality.

Certain unusually interesting letters from the series are the following:

A-3. Third letter threatening legal action:

Dear Sir:

You have been reminded several times of your overdue account on our books amounting to \$ . . . . We have tried to point out to you in a very courteous manner the importance of settling this account, but for some reason unknown to us you have failed to remit.

We aim to play fair and from all that I can gather from the records it appears we have been patient to a fault in waiting for your check. Now I must say to you very frankly and yet in all friendliness that this is the last letter that we shall write to you asking for payment of this account.

Of course, you know that there are methods of collection open to us, which although distasteful we shall not hesitate to adopt if necessary. I earnestly hope you will realize that it would be a serious matter for you to jeopardize your credit standing by further postponement of this settlement.

A copy of this letter will be held as a memorandum in my personal file until (6 days) which will give you ample time to get your check here. Let me urge you to send it off today.

Yours very truly,

C-1. First request on unpaid bill for prepaid freight:

Dear Sir:

It is indeed a great surprise to learn that the charge against you of \$. . . . representing freight prepaid on shipment is still unpaid.

This amount was paid out by us in cash as an accommodation, and as there is no profit on that amount, such items are due immediately when presented as is specified on the bill sent to you.

You have always made payments in accordance with our terms, but we do not quite understand why you failed to pay this small balance.

Will you please be so kind as to let us know?

Yours very truly,

## D-1. First request for payment of small bill:

Dear Sir:

Under date of ..... we sent you a second statement calling attention to a small bill which is now considerably past due. Not hearing from you we can only infer that our requests for a remittance have been overlooked, or that you have some reason for not paying this small bill.

In any event, we should like to hear from you, so as to avoid unnecessary correspondence, and the possibility of confusion later on.

Yours very truly,

## D-2. Second request for payment of small bill:

Dear Sir:

Knowing that it is the custom for some merchants to hold over small bills and include the amount when paying others, we think it well to explain that with us, each and every transaction is separate and distinct. It is therefore a great convenience to us to have each bill paid as it matures.

Will you please be kind enough to send us a check by return mail for the bill of ..... amounting to \$.....?

Yours very truly,

## E-2. Second request for payment of small balance:

Dear Sir:

You will recollect that you have received several letters relating to a small overdue balance on your account of \$.....

These letters must be more or less annoying to you, but as there appears to be no explanation of nonpayment, it is the only means which we can employ to keep you reminded of the condition of the account.

Undoubtedly, you have some good reason for not paying this amount, and the purpose of this letter is to get some idea as to why you do not pay it.

Won't you please explain on the back of this letter?

Yours very truly,



## E-3. Third request for payment of small balance:

Dear Sir:

In a recent letter we very courteously asked why you did not pay us a small balance of \$... ..

You must admit that we have given you every possible opportunity to dispose of this one way or the other, hence, in view of the fact that you have not done so, there is nothing to do but to consider the debt a legitimate one and conduct ourselves accordingly.

Please realize that it is not only expensive to be compelled to write one every so often on such a small matter as this, but it really grieves us that our efforts to adjust it apparently meet with so little sympathy and lack of cooperation.

Can we not rely on you to help us straighten this out?

Yours very truly,

## F-1. Expressing thanks for payment, asking for balance:

Dear Sir:

An examination of your account shows that by your last payment you reduced the overdue balance to \$... ..

In expressing our appreciation of your efforts to dispose of this debt, we nevertheless feel that inasmuch as the account is so long overdue you should take extraordinary steps to close it out.

We are genuinely interested in your success, and we sincerely hope that on receipt of this letter you will find it convenient to remit the difference mentioned and thereby prepare the way for even larger and more profitable business dealings between us.

Yours very truly,

## F-3. Acknowledgment of payment after lawyer's letter:

Dear Sir:

I notice on referring to your account this morning that there still remains a balance of \$ ....., although you did make payment of \$... .., after our attorney had written you in connection with the condition of your account.

Our lawyer now asks for instructions to proceed by suit, and I do not want to take that step, if it can be avoided. You must, however, understand that for the protection of our own interests, it is absolutely necessary that payments be made at maturity, and, failing to secure such payments through our own efforts, we are obliged to seek outside assistance.

Legal action means expense to you, but more important than this is the fact that the court records are always available to your other creditors, and action through the courts may result in the curtailment of your credit in other channels.

Take it all in all, this is a very serious matter to you, and I hope that you will prevent suit, by making full and complete payment of this difference by return mail.

Yours very truly,

### G-1. Notifying of request for credit information :

Dear Sir:

You will notice from the attached blank that your name is the subject of inquiry in the trade here.

We give you this information in confidence, feeling that you should be given an opportunity to put your account in the proper shape so that we can consistently answer the inquiry and show the account to be in current condition.

May we not have the pleasure of receiving your check by return mail and the return of this blank?

Yours very truly,

### K-3. Second letter on unpaid checks :

Dear Sir:

We have already written you regarding the check which was returned unpaid, and we expected immediate payment and some word as to how this happened. Neither has come to us.

It is harmful to let checks go back, and wrong to allow the amount to remain unpaid, but it becomes a serious matter when no explanation is made.

You owe it to yourself and your business to make good on this check and to explain fully.

We must insist upon hearing from you by the . . . . .  
(6 days after date of this letter).

Yours very truly,

### L-2. On return of draft and bill of lading :

Dear Sir:

The draft covering our recent shipment valued at \$ . . . . . has been returned to us attached to the B/L, as you did not accept it upon presentation. We are surprised to hear this, and would like to be informed as to your reasons so that we can make the necessary arrangement and avoid having the goods go to storage.

As far as we know, the shipment was made promptly and in accordance with your instructions, and naturally we expect you to live up to your end of the agreement.

We should be pleased to hear from you, and suggest that you attach this letter to your answer, as that will bring it to the writer and avoid the possibility of a misunderstanding.

Yours very truly,

**A Productive Letter.**—It is sometimes desirable, for variety's sake, to use a letter which makes no reference to a specific amount or to preceding correspondence, but puts the next move squarely up to the debtor's sense of fair play. Such a letter is the following, which has been used with good results by the Waite Hardware Company of Worcester, Mass. :

Gentlemen:

Our idea of a credit letter should be summarized as follows:

1. It should be brief.
2. It should be friendly.
3. It should be successful.

This letter is short. It is friendly. Its success rests with you.

Very truly yours,

WAITE HARDWARE COMPANY

By A. A. Parker  
Vice-President

On one occasion Mr. Parker saw a customer approach the cashier's desk, carrying a copy of this letter which had been sent to him. After paying the cashier the customer came to the vice-president's desk and said: "I have paid my account to the first of the month and I want to tell you how much I like the letter you sent me. May I have your permission to use it in my business? My books show many overdue accounts which I find difficult to collect. Your letter made me pay you. Perhaps if I use it, my customers will pay me."

Other requests for permission to use the same letter indicate that the effect on the recipient is particularly favorable.

**Coaching the Retailer.**—Occasionally the wholesaler finds it profitable to drop a good-natured hint to a retailer-debtor that he speed up his own collections, and thus put himself in a

position to meet his obligations to the supplier. The credit manager of a Pacific Coast wholesale house playfully suggested to one of the customers that he "hit somebody over the head for another \$20 to apply on the account." A few days later the wholesale concern received a check and the following letter :

Gentlemen :

Your letter of the 18th was duly received. Following your virile suggestion, we grasped a blackthorn and started for the tall timber in search of a victim.

One was soon found, and we applied the thorn with vigor. At the first crack he produced a twenty. Encouraged by this manifestation of the spirit of progress, we whammed him again and he delivered into our waiting hand another twenty.

Emboldened by this, we tried to repeat again, but our eagerness spoiled our aim and the glancing blow which resulted brought results of only \$13.41. Superstition decreed that we desist.

In other words, we succeeded in collecting \$53.41, and we enclose check for that amount.

Very truly yours,

## CHAPTER 24

### COLLECTION PROCEDURE—MANUFACTURERS

**Using Multigraph Form Letters.**—The credit and collection department of a manufacturing corporation with branches, agencies, and dealers all over this continent, has in stock no fewer than fifty multigraphed form letters. Its policy in regard to their use is as interesting as the letters themselves. A selection from the letters is presented as a final exhibit on this subject. This policy is issued in the following memorandum:

1. Nothing can take the place of personal contact with customers.
2. Form letters should be used only until the customer will answer *something*, and thus give a basis for a dictated letter that will exactly fit his particular case.
3. No collection letter should be more than one page in length.
4. Form letters should be revised at least once in six months;
  - (a) So that they will fit existing trade, money, and crop conditions.
  - (b) So that customers won't get to know them by heart.
  - (c) So that credit men will not use them mechanically.
5. Never argue with a customer.

In addition to the requirement that forms be frequently changed, several forms are prepared to cover the same situation, to provide still further variety. For instance, there are five first letters, five second letters, four third letters, four fourth letters, five fifth letters, and six attorney letters. In the case of some of these later letters, certain variations are due to differences in the situation. The utmost courtesy and fairness are shown in every letter.

**An Appeal to Pride.**—One of these “second” letters makes an interesting appeal to the customer’s pride by stating, “98 per cent of our customers settle on receipt of a reminder.”

*Charges due December 15—\$ .*

Gentlemen:

We do not believe in dun letters. We find that, with 98 per cent of our customers, all that ever is required to secure a mutually satisfactory settlement is a mere reminder that an account has become past due. This is all that this letter is intended to be.

We have as yet no record of receiving your remittance to cover the charges listed above. It is our belief that you are just as anxious to clean up any past-due items that may stand against you as we are to have those items balanced.

Under the circumstances, therefore, we shall look forward to receiving at least a partial settlement from you within the next few days.

Yours very truly,

**Disappointment at No Response.**—Another letter sent at this time is simpler and expresses disappointment.

*June Account \$ ...*

Gentlemen:

We are somewhat disappointed that our letter about this account sent you a few days ago has not met with a response.

We believe you will appreciate that the amount indicated above is unpaid and past due at this time, and we trust that there will be no delay on your part in forwarding a remittance.

Yours very truly,

**Pressing for Payment.**—Examples of the letters sent third in the series are the two following:

*Account \$.....*

Gentlemen:

We cannot find that we have heard from you in reply to either of our previous letters regarding this account. The amount which is now past due is listed above, and frankly, we think that it ought to be paid without further delay.

May we, therefore, depend upon your check reaching us within the next three or four days at the latest?

Yours very truly,

*Account \$*

Gentlemen:

We do not wish to appear too insistent regarding this account, but at the same time we feel that you would hardly think well of our business methods if we allowed you to forget it.

The amount listed above is at this time distinctly past due. If our reports are correct, it remains unpaid. We feel certain that you value a clean record with this company fully as much as we prize your goodwill. As a step toward fostering an even better understanding, therefore, we must ask you to make some arrangement, without further delay, to meet this obligation.

You may be sure that your action in this direction will be appreciated.

Very truly yours,

**Sending Sight Draft.**—When the account is thirty days overdue the company may give warning of a draft. One of the letters used for this purpose says: "It appears to be the custom with some of our friends to settle bills only when sight drafts have been drawn upon them. Is this your preference? Ordinarily we do not take this to be the case but unless we hear from you by return mail we shall conclude it so. We shall draw upon you and shall expect you to be good enough to take care of our draft." This is followed after a due interval by a letter announcing the draft and a letter to the bank. A follow-up "punch" letter to the bank is also included.

The "stage of urgency" is still more definitely indicated in the following letter which under different circumstances may be sent either in place of the draft or following it. Another similar letter begins with the sharp question: "Will you kindly favor us with a check by return mail in settlement of the above mentioned account?"

*Account \$ . . . . .*

Gentlemen:

We have written you on more than one occasion regarding our account. The balance is the figure quoted above. It is considerably overdue. We have waited patiently on you and cannot understand why we should not have received a remittance by this time.

Now we request your immediate attention to the matter and we frankly ask that you make payment without further delay.

In making the request we do not believe that we are asking for anything more than that to which you will consider us fairly entitled.

Yours very truly,

Or the fairness and leniency already shown are pointed out: "We believe you agree that our account ought now to receive your serious attention without further delay."

**In Sorrow Rather Than Anger.**—In an endeavor to "resell the house" to the delinquent, another letter recalls to him the pleasant relations which have existed.

*June Account \$.....*

Gentlemen:

We are unwilling to assume that the above account is being neglected by you, or that you are intentionally putting off the date of payment.

Naturally, Mr. .... (gentlemen), we have a high regard for yourself (for your good company), and have greatly valued our business associations with you. Anything which would tend to interrupt even temporarily the pleasantness of that association would be a matter of sincere regret to us. We believe that the association is one which undoubtedly will result to our mutual profit, and we are very anxious to see the volume of business between us increased.

However, you do not expect us to be satisfied with the present condition of your account. You have delayed for a long time making payment of the amount due. We are frank to state that this condition is not altogether pleasing to us, and we do not think that it is any more pleasing to you. An unpaid past-due account is as likely to breed friction as any one thing that we know of, and we do not wish any friction whatever between our good customers and ourselves.

We have been doing our best to eliminate any possible cause of misunderstanding by carrying your account for a long time after it became due. Surely you do not expect us to continue to do so. The next move should be made by you.

We are, therefore, looking forward to finding a check attached to your next letter and we shall expect that letter within the next three or four days.

Yours very truly,

**"The Turn of the Screw."**—When it becomes necessary to refer the account to an attorney, the company provides a variety of letters, some long and some short. In each, a sincere regret is expressed at the interruption of pleasant relations. One letter says, "We feel that there is nothing at this time which we can add to our previous correspondence." Another resells the terms of the house, expresses perfect willingness to help a



customer in a pinch, but points out the liberal extension already granted. Still another begins, "It is a matter of extreme regret to us that our previous attempts made in the spirit of friendship and goodwill to obtain payment of the balance due on our account have utterly failed." The following letter illustrates the step taken at this point; the third paragraph is optional for use with a previous delinquency.

*June and July Account \$ . . . . .*

Gentlemen:

The balance of our (June & July) account due from you at the present time is \$ . . . . . This matter has been placed before you on several occasions, but we do not seem to be able, through the medium of correspondence, to get any satisfaction from you in regard to these charges.

It seems equally useless to make drafts, and therefore we cannot see where there is any other course left to us but to take the usual measures to enforce collection of a past-due account.

(In this connection, we cannot help feeling that we are not receiving the treatment from you to which we are entitled as we find that we have on previous occasions had to suggest the possibility of having to place the account in the hands of our attorneys, before we could get settlement.)

We appreciate your business, and are anxious that the friendly relations which have existed in the past should still continue between us. At the same time it is only right that we should mention that if settlement of this account is not made within the next few days, we shall have no alternative but to ask our attorneys to take care of our interests in the matter.

We regret the necessity for sending you this message, and trust to your sense of fairness to set this matter right, and to forward a check to cover the items referred to without delay.

Yours very truly,

**A Case of Unusual Importance.**—If a firm is in apparently good standing, a letter at this point begins with an expression of genuine surprise at the fact that no response has been received. "All the information at our command," the letter goes on, "would indicate that you are amply responsible in a financial way and that you are well able to meet your current obligations as they mature. We have had every confidence in you and do not wish that confidence to be mistaken.

"It would certainly be strange to us if we had to resort to such an unusual and disagreeable course as to place an account against a firm with the standing of your good selves in the hands of attorneys for attention, and we are writing this letter, therefore, as a last endeavor on our part to prevent any such action if it is necessary."

This letter differs from all others in the series in extending slightly over one page—an indication of the unusual earnestness of the appeal to pride and fair play involved in this letter.

**A Letter from the Branch Manager.**—In a case of unusual importance, the branch manager may be called upon to use his personal influence to obtain an amicable settlement. His belief that legal measures are unnecessary is expressed below:

*June and July Account \$ . . .*

Gentlemen:

Our Credit Department has just referred to me for personal attention the charges which stand on our books against you. They have shown me the file of correspondence regarding this account. It seems that they have written quite a number of letters on the subject and of course you have been receiving statements at the beginning of each of the last several months, but so far we have not received the looked for response in the shape of a check.

It has been suggested that the matter be referred to our legal representatives for attention, but it occurred to me to write you a letter on the subject as I really do not anticipate that any such action on their part will be necessary. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the account is correctly rendered. I have not been made aware of any reason why payment should not be made. All the information we have at hand would indicate that you are amply responsible in a financial way and we have always understood that it is your custom to meet your obligations satisfactorily.

Won't you, therefore, do me the favor of responding to this letter promptly and, if the account is correctly rendered, send us a check, and if there is any error please tell us frankly about it so that we may investigate and if it is found to exist, correct it?

We have been anxious to give you good service in every possible way and naturally I feel that there should be no reason for our being forced to take extraordinary measures to collect an account from a customer whose business we value as we do yours.

Yours truly,

.....  
BRANCH MANAGER

**Avoiding Controversy Over Small Amount.**—Various other letters are provided for acknowledging payments made on account and asking, with more or less urgency, for the balance; for refusing extension and making various part payment arrangements; for returning a note as contrary to the company's policy, and suggesting a different arrangement; and for handling various problems arising in connection with the cash discount. For example, the company in a courteous letter of some length explains its inability to allow discounts taken in the second month, on bills rendered in the last few days of the month. A somewhat more severe letter to a customer who has taken the discount when his payment was thirty days overdue, explains that the reason for the discount is to secure prompt payment, and the company cannot allow both time and discount of the payment.

The close personal connection between the branch manager and the customer is taken advantage of when it is decided to allow an unearned discount rather than create friction; or when the home office has determined to charge off a small item which it has been unable to collect.

Gentlemen:

Our Credit Department has brought to my attention the charge against you dated June 15 amounting to \$2 63.

I am frank to state that I cannot understand why you do not pay it as it seems to me that it is a correct charge and one which ought, in the regular course of business, to be settled by you. At the same time, we do not wish to get into a controversy with you over an item of \$2.63.

We value your business and—more even than your business—your goodwill. Rather, therefore, than allow the possibility of a misunderstanding over such a small item to interfere with our good relations in the future, we shall recommend our home office to charge off this item of \$2.63, in the hope that in the future you will settle our charges as rendered so that no similar opportunity for a misunderstanding will exist.

Yours very truly,

.....

BRANCH MANAGER

**Selected Dennison Letters.**—From a twelve-letter series developed by the Dennison Manufacturing Company of Fram-

ingham, Mass., and given wide circulation by the Policyholders Service Bureau of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, the following are selected:

*(First letter)*

Gentlemen:

If, just prior to the date above, you mailed a check to pay for charges on your account that matured recently, you may ignore this letter.

It is merely a reminder, for perhaps you have not had an opportunity to check the statement that we sent a few days ago.

Very truly yours,

---

*(Second letter)*

Gentlemen:

This letter is entirely impersonal. It is sent on those accounts which may have items open and a bit past due.

So, if by any chance the bill of ..... has not been paid, please take this opportunity to tell us about it.

On the other hand, sending us your check will close the charges satisfactorily all around.

Very truly yours,

---

*(Third letter)*

Gentlemen:

For some reason the bill which became due recently has not been paid.

Oversights are so often responsible for invoices remaining unpaid that in this case we are sure that a timely reminder of this kind is all that is necessary to prevent the charge from becoming further overdue.

Will you, therefore, please arrange to send your check today?

Very truly yours,

---

*(Fourth letter)*

Gentlemen:

We find in going over our ledgers again today that the item we spoke of in our last letter has not been paid. This being so, may we ask that you send your check for it unless by chance there is some question you want to ask about it?

Very truly yours,

*(Fifth letter—first reference to terms)*

Gentlemen:

The only reason that might easily account for your delay in paying the bills we have brought to your attention is a possible misunderstanding about the terms of sale.

They are based upon payment within thirty days from the invoice date. We bill and price our goods strictly upon that condition.

If you have not already mailed your check, please consider the extra time of which you have had the advantage, and send your check by return mail.

Very truly yours,

---

*(About middle of series—letter addressed to treasurer)*

Dear Sir:

Our preceding letters to your company about your account have resulted in neither a check nor a reply. We believe that our letters have failed to reach the right person. That explains our writing directly to you.

Our invoices are net cash thirty days. Therefore, the account for the goods invoiced to you on ..... is considerably overdue. You will not, we are confident, permit it to remain unpaid any longer. If you will see that a check is mailed at once, we shall appreciate your attention.

Very truly yours,

---

*(Final letter—appealing to customer's sense of fairness)*

Gentlemen:

We have reviewed carefully all the facts connected with your unpaid account. We now think that it should be paid at once. But before changing our procedure for obtaining that result, we want to outline the situation briefly and have you see it as we do.

The account has been running without the payments which are needed to keep it at least partly on an even keel. The amount open is \$ .... Your last payment was .. . . . . . We need not set down the comparison—you do it. But please, when doing so, look at our side as well as yours. Does not your conclusion prompt you to send your check in full?

We have arrived at the time now when a limit has been reached. You have been doing business right along, yet we don't think that you have considered us to the degree you should have, when making payments. So, unless you can send your check at once, we must plan to protect our interests.

Very truly yours,

## CHAPTER 25

### COLLECTING MAIL-ORDER ACCOUNTS

**The Mail-Order Idea.**—The phenomenal development of mail-order selling has been based, fundamentally, on three strong appeals which have been made to the customer. One is lower prices, made possible by the elimination of intermediate factors in the distribution process. Another is convenience. The customer is able to sit in his own home and order from a catalog which gives him more accurate and detailed information about the merchandise than he would be likely to get from the average salesperson in a retail store. And the third is a wide range of selection in style, quality, and price.

The convenience motive has been well summed up by Lloyd K. Jones of Chicago, who says: "If a man in New York offers me something I want, it is easier for me to send my order to him than to go down town and look around for it. Let's figure it out: time of riding down to Chicago's 'Loop' from my home—40 minutes; return trip, another 40 minutes; shopping perhaps 70 minutes; total, 150 minutes, or 2½ hours, with not a penny saved on the transaction. In fact, the man in New York will refund my money if I squawk, and maybe the Loop store will give me an argument."

**Credit in Mail-Order Selling.**—The normal mail-order sale is, of course, a cash transaction. The customer makes his selections from a catalog or other printed description, fills out an order blank and sends it to the dealer with cash, check, or money order attached. But the dealer has found it necessary to make exceptions to the cash-with-order rule, and thus credit terms and collection problems have entered the picture for this class of purchase.

One reason for this development is the fact that the mail-order plan of selling has been applied to articles and services sold at a price the average buyer could not meet conveniently in one payment. He might buy a hat, a set of tools or a fishing outfit on the cash-with-order plan. But he could not purchase an expensive set of books, a radio set, or ready-cut building materials on the same terms.

Another reason for modifying the cash-with-order rule is variation in purchasing power and the desire to buy, due to changes in general business conditions. When times are good, the mail-order houses can depend on a steady flow of cash-with-order business. When a boom is succeeded by deflation and depression, terms have to be made easier if a serious shrinkage in volume is to be avoided. Montgomery Ward & Company, for example, facing greatly reduced sales in a depression period, effectively checked the downward trend by a slight reduction in prices and a sweeping extension of the time payment privilege.

**Credit Information.**—Obviously, the mail-order house takes a considerable risk when it sends merchandise on credit terms to a customer it has never seen. But it has no choice in the matter. The profit on the average sale is too small to justify the expense of a careful credit investigation. The mail-order seller must bank heavily on the belief that most people are honest and will pay their bills if they can.

In certain lines of business the seller requires the buyer to fill out and send in a short form, covering a few items such as the buyer's business and banking connections, and the names of establishments with which he has charge accounts. In some cases these are not, because of the expense involved, followed up at all unless trouble develops with the account. The purpose of asking for the report is largely psychological.

This procedure seems, at first thought, to be loose and un-businesslike. And yet it has worked out fairly well, not only for mail-order merchandisers but also for the publishers of books and correspondence courses, who gave the system a

thorough test long before the merchandise houses applied the instalment principle extensively to mail-order sales.

**Resale Principle in Mail-Order Selling.**—In collecting time payments, the resale principle is invaluable. In fact, the mail-order house should make extensive use of the principle with all of its customers, except one class—those who order with the privilege of examination, and then neither pay the bill nor return the goods. The problem in this case is to get back the goods and mark the customer off the list as soon as possible.

Instalment selling of any kind calls, of course, for a system of notifying the customer of the payments as they become due. *Every statement* should carry, or be accompanied by, some resale argument or material. The customer who buys merchandise or service on an eight-payment plan must be sold not once but eight times. That calls for at least eight valid reasons why he should have made the original purchase decision.

**Special Devices.**—In some cases it is possible to speed up collections on time payments by a special inducement, in the form of a premium. A jewelry house, for example, sells a watch for \$10 down and eight monthly payments of \$5 each. After two or three of the monthly payments have been made it offers the buyer a fountain pen or some other article of equal value if he will anticipate the remaining payments and clean up the account. If the buyer is satisfied with the watch and intends to complete the payments he is more than likely to take advantage of the offer and get the account off his mind. This plan may have disadvantages, and some dealers regard it as undignified, but it has been frequently used and is mentioned here simply as an example of the special device in time payment collections.

**Selling Fish on Credit.**—There is hardly a magazine reader in the United States who has not been impressed with the advertising of the Frank E. Davis Company of Gloucester, Mass. Through the courtesy of officers of the company, it is possible



to present the following story of the safeguards thrown around their extraordinary offers.

From the advertising, which is of a bright, attractive character appealing strongly to people of refinement whether their means are large or small, the reader gains the impression that he can send cash with his order without fear of disappointment; but if he prefers the convenience of a charge account and can give satisfactory references, he may pay by the month. Now, bear in mind that the local fish dealer, butcher, or grocer has plenty of trouble in collecting from these same customers. How can collection be made successfully by a "fish man" a thousand miles away?

To begin with, the goods are constantly "resold" to the customer. The company thinks he is resold every time he has their mackerel for breakfast. If his stock has run out it is only a few weeks before a tantalizing letter or circular is received from Gloucester, and the man of the house exclaims, "My goodness, Maria, let's order another pail of mackerel. And by the way," he may add, "I must send them a check for their last bill. They sent me a reminder in regard to it the other day."

The company's own account of their operations should increase any purchaser's confidence in doing business with this particular house.

"In the first place," they say, "our customers are circularized from lists which are supposed to give only the names of financially responsible people. Our order blanks, which go out with the circulars, stipulate that charge accounts will be opened only if suitable references are furnished. When references are not given and from the appearance of the order it looks as if the prospective customer were not a good credit risk, he is looked up in Dun's, in the Bankers' Directory, and in the various other rating books, and if he is not given in any of these, a report is procured from some reporting agency or bank. If the report is favorable, the order is shipped; if not, the customer is asked to send cash in advance to cover the amount of his order.

"We recently began a new system of advertising in several magazines, offering to send a trial pail of mackerel or box of codfish on ten days' approval if the prospect would give bank or business references. If the references given are good, the order is shipped at once. If the references given look questionable, the order is carefully studied. Stationery, address, handwriting, in fact, everything that will help us determine the person's responsibility, are taken into consideration. If the order does not look promising, we write to a reporting agency or bank for a report, or, if the order looks very bad, direct to the person ordering for cash. In cases where no reference is given the following form letter is sent to the purchaser.

Dear Sir:

You are going to be mighty well pleased with the pail of salt mackerel from Gloucester. For the fish are some of the finest I've ever seen—anybody who likes salt water fish can't very well help being delighted with them.

When you sent in the coupon in response to my advertisement, you omitted to give your business connection or reference. Probably you didn't notice it. It's such a little thing to do, however, that I feel sure you won't mind accommodating me by filling it in on this sheet.

Then return this letter in the enclosed envelope, and the pail of mackerel that I've had packed for you will be on its way soon.

Very truly yours,

"From 3 to 1½ per cent of our surplus has been reserved to cover the loss from bad bills. Last year, however, it seemed that 1 per cent would be more than enough to cover this loss for the coming year.

"Our accounts are handled by the card system and are filed chronologically by weeks. The regular, or thirty-day accounts, receive a statement and form letter—thirty days from the date of shipment, if shipped by express, and sixty days from date of shipment, if shipped by freight. The ten-day accounts, or memo invoices, as we call the special mackerel and codfish accounts, are followed up ten days from date of shipment—though now, taking into consideration the unsettled business conditions we have found it advisable to allow twenty days.

*"The first letter reads as follows :*

Dear Sir:

There are a good many things on our list that you haven't tried yet. We hope that you are so well pleased with the shipment sent you recently that you'll let us make you acquainted with some of our other products.

Your order needn't necessarily be a large one. Just list the things that appeal to you on the enclosed order blank and we'll be glad to give it our prompt and careful attention.

Probably you will also want to send us a check for your previous account, so we are enclosing a statement.

Yours very truly,

*"The second letter goes out two weeks from the date the first one is sent.*

Dear Sir:

Your account being still unpaid, we are wondering why you are withholding remittance.

This being your first shipment of goods from us, we are hoping you are thoroughly satisfied as we want you to become a regular customer. Perhaps you have not had time to use all the goods, but doubtless you have satisfied yourself as to the general quality of our products. Even after paying the bill, if you have any complaint, we will be perfectly willing to make adjustment.

By this time you must be wanting some more of our goods, so send us your order when remitting and we will be very glad to fill it on our usual terms.

Yours very truly,

*"A second letter to old customers is as follows :*

Dear Sir:

Statement of your account was sent you a few days ago, but we have heard nothing from you. Doubtless the matter has been overlooked, and we would not bring it up again so soon, if we knew that to be so. However it may be that something in this last order has displeased you. If so, we should like to hear from you at once so as to make satisfactory adjustment.

If you want more of our goods, send us your order when remitting, and it will be promptly and carefully filled.

Yours very truly,

"*The third letter* is sent if the account is still unpaid two weeks from the date of the second.

Dear Sir:

Your account, while not greatly overdue, has gone beyond the 30 days we allow our customers.

We have written you twice in reference to it, and you have not yet given us your reason for withholding remittance. We understand that it is easy to neglect a small bill and that sometimes circumstances prevent prompt payment, but we should like to have you write us anyway. If anything is wrong with the goods, we want to know at once. If not, we should be glad to receive the amount due us as soon as possible.

Yours very truly,

"The account then rests two weeks. Then two or three personal letters are written at close intervals and if these do not work, a Merchant's Credit Guide form or a National Trade Exchange 10 days' notice is sent, which usually brings the desired results. Only as a last resort is an account turned over to an attorney or collection agency and we are glad to say that we do not find it necessary to have many of our accounts collected in this way."

**A Triumph for Resale Principles.**—The old-fashioned credit man would as soon think of opening the window and walking out in mid-air as of carrying out a marketing plan like that of this seller of fish from Gloucester. Without a knowledge of resale principles, it would be impossible; but with that knowledge, the marketing manager walks not on thin air but on a scientific knowledge of the principles of human nature, tested and proved in the crucible of experience.

## CHAPTER 26

### COLLECTING MAIL-ORDER ACCOUNTS—AN UNUSUAL CREDIT RISK

**Goods Sent on Approval.**—The man who sends you goods by mail and lets you sample them before deciding whether you will pay him or not is taking chances with your honesty—or perhaps that is the way you feel about it. You know, however, that he has means of his own for being satisfied as to your reliability before shipping his goods. If his merchandise is satisfactory, you are willing to go right on paying for it, in order to get regular shipments.

One such company, selling cigars, prepared a series of twelve letters to form the stages of its collection campaign.

*The first letter* assumes an oversight and resells the goods at the same time that it asks for a new order.

Dear Sir:

With business doing flip-flops, and the air full of uncertainty, it's natural to overlook so small a thing as the amount of \$.... .. due.

This is truly a thinking time—and how can a man think better or more clearly than after selecting and lighting a rich-flavored, mellow cigar?

If you've reached the bottom row in your last box, the enclosed envelope is just in time to bring back an order for a fresh box and your check for \$.....

Yours very truly,

*The second letter* drops the resale suggestion and concentrates on a request for action.

Dear Sir:

Up to this morning's mail, I had been expecting your remittance for \$..... to apply on the amount due on your account.

I note that two reminders of it have gone to you but perhaps they failed to reach you.

Just pin a check or a money order to the enclosed statement and drop it in the mail tonight. You may use the envelope enclosed for the purpose; but please attend to it before you forget it.

Yours very truly,

*The third letter* refers to some item relating to the customer that makes the letter more personal; asks for cooperation, and contains suggestive appeals to pride and fair play.

Dear Sir:

As ..... (position)\* of the ..... Company, you know, of course, that it is necessary to "jog" a man about his accounts occasionally. Most of us do—but we'd all rather not.

We'd rather, of course, put all our time and effort into improving our service and spreading the fame of any one of a dozen of our pet brands.

I started to write you about your account. It was understood, you know, that we might count on your check within ..... (terms). We particularly want your cooperation in keeping it within the limit. I find that \$..... is needed now to square the account up to the present time.

The envelope enclosed will serve to bring me your check.

Yours very truly,

*The fourth letter* is shorter and contains another strong "cooperation" appeal.

Dear Sir:

You have been so good about cooperating with us in the past, that I feel we may rely upon you now to help us maintain your standard of payments on your account.

Prompt remittances help us to give the very best measure of practical service to you and to others.

If you will let me have your check, then, to cover the ..... bill which amounts to \$ . . . . ., you will be helping very materially to the end we are aiming for.

I am counting on your continued aid.

Yours very truly,

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\* To be filled in from customer's information card.

*The fifth letter* tries the effect of an appeal to the desire to succeed, coupled with an attempt to arouse the sense of shame in the delinquent customer.

Dear Sir:

A man who pays an old account proves his own ability to overcome a handicap.

But as long as you do nothing toward the payment of such a past-due obligation, you confess to yourself, and to those who know you, a serious weakness.

Let's help you to clean the slate. A small payment weekly or monthly will gradually overcome the handicap and unless you make some such effort to recover ground, you cannot hope to win.

Why not start today?

Yours very truly,

*The sixth letter* offers an instalment payment plan and asks as a measure of fair play that the customer continue to buy cigars from the man who has always treated him so squarely.

Dear Sir:

Simply as a reminder of your indebtedness to us, I enclose a statement of your account now long overdue.

If you cannot fully dispose of this small amount just now, send us something on the account each week or each month—say, \$1 at a time.

I appreciate the fact that any number of things might come up unexpectedly to interfere with your payment plans. That's why I want to make it as easy as possible for you to take care of your account and at the same time, feel free to continue sending me your orders.

About your present purchase—you are doubtless buying cigars somewhere. Why not from me? I feel that I am entitled to your patronage. Don't you?

I have every confidence in you and in your sincere wish to meet me half way. That is why I shall look for a definite confirmation of the plan I suggest.

Don't forget the order when you write.

Yours very truly,

*The seventh letter* makes a frank, straight-from-the-shoulder appeal, omitting any resale element.

Dear Sir:

A glance at the date of the attached statement will make you realize how long your account with us has been neglected.

Put yourself in my shoes. As a fair-minded man, you will admit that I have shown you every possible consideration in this matter. In a sincere, straight-from-the-shoulder way, I have written you about your account time and time again, hoping that each letter would be the last one needed to bring response.

I want to retain your friendship and goodwill, but I feel that some of the effort to do so should come from you.

Let's put an end to all this uncertainty. Meet me half way in this effort to re-establish cordial relations. A letter of explanation or a check for \$... from you is all that is needed. Please do not disappoint me this time.

Yours very truly,

*The eighth letter* begins by representing that the account has passed from the hands of a subordinate into the hands of a superior officer. He offers one more chance for an explanation.

Dear Sir:

A memorandum showing how you have neglected your account with us, amounting to \$... was placed on my desk this morning together with the folder containing your correspondence and all the orders you have sent us so far.

Everything about our past relations has inspired confidence in your integrity and your ability to pay the amount as agreed upon for goods ordered.

There must be some change in your circumstances about which I have not been told, for I cannot otherwise understand why you have permitted your account to go so long unpaid.

I feel that if there is an explanation to be made, I am entitled to have it and I'm writing you now with the one purpose in view of asking you for an explanation and a definite idea of what we may expect from you, and when, or for your check for \$.....

I shall expect your reply in the envelope enclosed.

Yours very truly,



*The ninth letter* reminds the smoker of the values he is losing by not being in a position to order more cigars; the letter presents in a new form appeals to fair play.

Dear Sir:

You have not replied to a long series of letters and reminders of a balance due us on your account, although every one of them called for and deserved a response.

I don't want you to feel that we are in any way treating you unfairly in expecting you to reply promptly to our letters telling us definitely what we may expect from you. Our attitude toward you has, from the start, been one of consideration and I am glad to say that we are always anxious to maintain that attitude.

We want to make it possible for you to continue to get the benefit of our "factory to smoker" quality and prices. They are worth just as much to you as they are to a great many others. At the same time, I do not feel that I need hesitate about asking you to say now what you expect to do about taking care of the payments.

Please write me frankly. Give me a chance to cooperate with you on some plan to dispose of the matter without further waiting.

Yours very truly,

*The tenth letter* demands an answer and seeks to arouse the debtor's sense of shame by its introductory request, "Please do not postpone longer a definite reply," and by the sentence which shows how easy it is for the smoker to write at least a letter of explanation.

Dear Sir:

Please do not postpone longer a definite reply to our numerous letters and reminders of the amount due on your account with us.

You may have valid reasons for your failure to make payments as agreed. Whatever they are, we are entitled to know them. We are always ready and willing to make reasonable allowance for unusual circumstances—even to the extent of granting further credit accommodation or reducing the amount due by small payments weekly or monthly, if necessary—but we must know the facts.

It is so very easy for you to write a letter to explain your apparent neglect, that the least we shall expect from you is such an explanation of your silence and delay.

We cannot afford to continue longer this one-sided correspondence. The explanation of your silence is, therefore, expected.

I must ask that you let me hear from you at once. The amount now due is \$ . . .

Yours very truly,

*The eleventh letter* is a novel device to secure attention and to appeal to the savings instinct at the same time. It offers the customer 50 per cent of the amount due if he will pay the balance. The action is put on consistent grounds. The entire business, says the letter, is founded on good faith and friendship, and the company prefers to keep it so.

Dear Sir:

If this business of ours wasn't different—if we hadn't unlimited faith in the certainty of a square deal from every one of our customers, I should be turning your account over to a collection agency about now.

I'd have to give them 50 per cent of the amount collected and I should almost certainly lose you as a customer because of the methods such people employ.

Well, I'm not going to give 50 per cent of what you owe me to any such agency. Neither do I want to lose your friendship and goodwill.

I don't know why you haven't sent me what you owe but whatever the reason, it must be a good one. Nevertheless, I've decided to make you this proposition: Pay me 50 per cent of the amount of the attached statement and keep the other 50 per cent for yourself. If there is any fairer offer I can make, I don't know what it is.

As soon as I get your check for half the amount you owe me, I shall credit your account with the other half too—I'll send you a receipt in full.

Enclose a check for your 50 per cent before I have a chance to change my mind.

Yours very truly,

*The twelfth (last) letter* is interesting despite the many valid reasons which can be urged against it. It is nothing more nor less than a free gift to the customer of the amount of his bill. It is more than possible that a man so treated might "try it again" under a different name, or get one of his friends to make the attempt in the hope of getting cigars for nothing. Instalment and mail-order houses are nearly agreed that it is not worth while to retain the goodwill of a customer whose account has been seriously delinquent. Under no circumstances would they sell such a customer again. Moreover, they claim, there is always the chance that a delinquent account may be collected, even after it has been charged

off the books, so that to give up one's right in the account would mean a very real possibility of money loss besides encouraging the dishonest purchaser to attempt to secure goods without paying full price for them.

Dear Sir:

For a good many years past, I have been dealing through the mails with thousands and thousands of men all over this country.

My experience has proved to me not once, but almost invariably that most men—over 99½ per cent—are honest. They carry out their agreements—pay their debts.

The amount of \$ . . . which has been due us from you since . . . , and about which I have written you a dozen times, is a just debt for cigars ordered by you and delivered to and consumed by you. There is only one thing left for me to do. I have told you why I do not feel that I care to place this account in the hands of an attorney or follow any one of a number of disagreeable procedures which would be the usual practice.

I am simply going to assume that you are right and I am wrong—that for some reason, unknown to me, you have satisfied your own sense of what is just and that you really are convinced that you do not owe me for the cigars shipped.

Having reached this conclusion, I enclose with this letter a receipt in full for the amount of your account. You may consider, then, that this is my last letter to you and that the account is closed.

Yours very truly,

**Criticism of the Series.**—In judging the merit of the preceding chain of letters, it must be remembered that the credit hold on the customer was exceedingly slight and that since the company secured the names of most of its new customers through the recommendation of satisfied customers, the retention of goodwill was important to their business. Resale material and appeals to goodwill were therefore adopted as the chief elements of the collection theory. It is probable, however, that more “teeth” could have been put into the series without injuring it. Moreover, there is considerable similarity in the tone of several of the letters; perhaps more use could have been made of the principle of surprise.

**Unordered Goods.**—It is doubtful whether the term “mail-order” may properly be applied to the practice, which has

developed so extensively during the past few years, of sending unsolicited goods for sampling or examination. The merchandise may be "mailed," but it is certainly not "ordered." Many people strongly resent receiving goods for which they have not asked, even when the object of the transaction is philanthropy rather than profit-making. A New Yorker who received a tooth-brush bearing his initials, together with a request for a dollar contribution to a certain hospital, replied: "You have made a mistake. I did not order a tooth-brush, and I will not be bullied into giving, even to an institution as worthy and as useful as yours."

It is conceivable, of course, that in certain cases this method may be successful. If the dealer has a product which really "sells itself," he may be able to market enough to make the venture profitable. But the credit risk is enormous. Too many people are offended. Too many will use the goods and pay no attention to bills or follow-up, confident that the seller, with no order to show, will not press collection very vigorously.

A sales method that many people take as a joke is not likely to be entirely successful. A physician in Pennsylvania received six pairs of socks from an eastern house with the following letter enclosed:

Dear Sir:

We are taking the liberty of sending you six pairs of exceptionally good hose. Because these hose have the approval of thousands of discriminating dressers, we know that you will like them.

Please send us \$2.00.

Very truly yours,

This is the doctor's reply:

Gentlemen:

I am taking the liberty of sending you \$2 worth of extra fine pills. These pills have helped thousands and I am sure that you will appreciate my thoughtfulness in sending them to you.

Please accept them in payment for the hose you sent me under date of June 3.

Very truly yours,

## CHAPTER 27

### INSTALMENT COLLECTIONS

**The Deferred Payment Plan.**—Although it did not come into full flower until the automobile period of our industrial history, the instalment plan of selling has been in use in this country for more than a century. It was first applied to sales of furniture, and the New York firm of Cowperthwait and Sons, which introduced the plan in 1807, is still in business. It is now the chief plan used in the sale of high-cost equipment and luxuries, including not only motor cars and furniture but also pianos, radio sets, phonographs, washing machines, vacuum cleaners, sewing machines, gas stoves, and electrical equipment including refrigerators.

**General Plan of Operation.**—Under the deferred payment plan the buyer contracts to make a “down payment” in cash, and other payments spread over a period of months or years. On making the initial payment he gets possession of the goods but not title to them. That is retained by the seller, who may repossess the property if the buyer does not complete his payments as stipulated in the contract. The instalment payments are generally represented by notes, and while in some lines of business the dealers still make their own collections, in a far greater number of cases this job is turned over to an outside agency—the finance company.

**Objections to the Plan.**—In the United States and in England (where the plan is called “hire purchase”) there have been many objectors to the system. Their chief arguments have been that the buyer was encouraged to be extravagant; that he mortgaged future income which he might or might not receive; and that while the plan might work out satisfactorily in prosperous times it was sure to collapse in the event of a

depression. In this country the National Association of Credit Men took a strong stand against the *abuse* rather than the *use* of the system, justifying its application to the purchase of capital goods, such as machinery and equipment, but warning against its general use in the buying of luxuries or goods whose life is likely to be shorter than the period covered by the instalment payments.

On the whole it is fair to say that the fears of the objectors have not been realized. The depression came, but the instalment system did not collapse. Repossessions were not unduly increased. In view of general unemployment, buyers were slow at entering into new contracts, but they managed to keep up their payments fairly well on those already entered into. The finance companies, carrying millions in instalment notes, came through without serious difficulty.

**Volume of Instalment Sales.**—Figures on instalment sales must be taken with more than a grain of salt. Two of America's leading economists, independently estimating the amount of instalment sales for a given year, arrived at totals a *billion* dollars apart. This inspired the comment that the economists were "guesstimating rather than estimating." It is fairly certain, however, that in a normal year instalment sales in the United States amount to between five billion and six billion dollars, with about two-fifths of that amount outstanding at a given time.

**Percentages in Various Lines of Business.**—The Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce of the United States Department of Commerce recently made a survey of 33 trades, and developed the fact that more than 10 per cent of the dealers in 18 of these trades were selling on the instalment plan.

Stove and range dealers reported that 73.2 per cent of their business was done on deferred payments; musical instrument stores, 54.7 per cent; electrical appliance stores, 49.2 per cent; and automobile dealers 46.9 per cent. The data assembled indicated that where the instalment selling was done in accordance with a sound financial plan the bad debt losses were less than those on open accounts.

According to the survey, jewelry stores do only 17.2 per cent of their business on the instalment plan. The report stated that this was one line of business in which the best methods of instalment selling were not being used.

**Terms.**—Terms in instalment selling vary widely as between various classes of goods, and even as between different parts of the country on the same goods. As an instance of the latter, when the National Association of Finance Companies was formed it adopted a resolution advocating adherence to terms for down payment of at least one-half of the cash price at point of delivery for new automobiles, and not over 40 per cent for used cars, with not to exceed twelve months allowed to complete payments. Within a year or so, however, dealers on the Pacific Coast were accepting as low as 25 per cent down, and allowing eighteen months' time. These terms gradually worked their way east, and the action of the Association was virtually nullified.

**"Cleveland Terms."**—The Cleveland Retail Credit Men's Association has made a careful study of instalment terms, and has issued schedules which are carefully followed in many parts of the country. The Association's recommendations in regard to the percentage of down payment are as follows:

10%	Ironing machines, kitchen cabinets, phonographs, pianos, refrigerators (both mechanical and iced), stoves and heaters, washing machines
15%	Dinnerware
20%	Radios
25%	Bicycles, cedar chests, draperies, electrical apparatus (miscellaneous), electrical ranges and cookers, furniture, furs and fur-trimmed coats, glassware, lamps, motion picture machines, phonograph and radio combinations, player roll cabinets, porch and lawn swings, rugs and carpets, silverware, jewelry

On maximum time allowed for completion of payments, the Cleveland Association's recommendations are as follows:

- 4 mos. Bicycles, porch and lawn swings
- 6 mos. Cedar chests, dinnerware, draperies, electrical appliances (miscellaneous), furs and fur-trimmed coats, glassware, lamps, motion picture machines, player roll cabinets, silverware, jewelry
- 8 mos. Radios, refrigerators (iced)
- 12 mos. Electrical ranges and cookers, furniture, ironing machines, kitchen cabinets, phonographs, phonograph and radio combinations, refrigerators (mechanical), rugs and carpets, stoves and heaters, vacuum cleaners, washing machines
- 30 mos. Pianos

**Other Cleveland Suggestions.**—In connection with the schedules from which the above summaries have been made, the Cleveland Retail Credit Men's Association issues the following suggestions in regard to instalment sale contracts :

#### MINIMUM AMOUNT OF CONTRACT

No deferred payment account to be opened where the amount of purchase is less than \$25.

#### MINIMUM AMOUNT OF MONTHLY INSTALMENT

The minimum monthly instalment on any deferred payment contract to be \$5.

#### SCHEDULE OF CARRYING CHARGES

The following schedule of carrying charges is recommended : 4 per cent on unpaid balance irrespective of length of time for which contract is executed, subject to the following refunds :

- If paid within 90 days, entire carrying charge to be refunded
- If paid within 4 mos., 8/12 of carrying charge to be refunded
- If paid within 5 mos., 7/12 of carrying charge to be refunded
- If paid within 6 mos., 6/12 of carrying charge to be refunded
- If paid within 7 mos., 5/12 of carrying charge to be refunded
- If paid within 8 mos., 4/12 of carrying charge to be refunded
- If paid within 9 mos., 3/12 of carrying charge to be refunded
- If paid within 10 mos., 2/12 of carrying charge to be refunded
- If paid within 11 mos., 1/12 of carrying charge to be refunded

Refund on carrying charge to be based on actual number of months taken to pay the account, irrespective of time contracted for (any fraction of a month to be treated as a full month).



## LARGE CONTRACTS

It is suggested that the proposed standard carrying charge of 4 per cent be applied to all contracts involving sums up to \$2,000 and that on contracts involving more than \$2,000 carrying charge of 2 per cent be applied to the amount in excess of \$2,000.

## CONTRACTS INVOLVING SEVERAL TYPES OF MERCHANDISE

On instalment accounts involving more than one type of merchandise it is suggested that the terms applying to the merchandise representing the major portion of the account be applied to the entire contract.

## COLLECTION OF CARRYING CHARGE

This is optional with the various stores as to whether the carrying charge will be collected with the down payment or added to the account. Both methods have proved satisfactory.

**Finance Companies.**—To the automobile industry belongs the honor of having developed the finance company as the chief agency for handling instalment paper. For several years after the first "automobile bank" was organized in 1913, the activities of the finance companies were largely concentrated in the handling of automobile paper, but since the war these companies have extended their business to cover most of the higher-priced articles that are sold on instalment terms.

**The "G. M. A. C. Plan."**—Typical of these institutions, which have come to hold a very important place in the modern financial structure, is the General Motors Acceptance Corporation, organized and controlled by General Motors Corporation. Under the "G. M. A. C. plan," General Motors dealers who have qualified after a careful credit appraisal may purchase new passenger cars or trucks direct from the manufacturing divisions of General Motors Corporation (or their distributors) by paying partly in cash, and the balance as the machines are paid for individually and released, or at an agreed date after shipment from the factory. The Corporation retains control of the cars thus financed until the final payment on each is made. The service charge includes interest to maturity

and insurance protection for the dealer, for his full laid down price, against loss or damage because of fire or theft.

With the backing provided by this arrangement, the General Motors dealers are in a position to sell the Corporation's products to customers in good credit standing, on terms suited to the purchaser's income. The buyer makes a down payment (usually a third of the purchase price, or more) and obligates himself to pay the remainder in equal instalments. The price paid is the cash price plus the G. M. A. C. service charge. A lien is retained on the product until payment is completed.

On all obligations of the purchaser which are bought by General Motors Acceptance Corporation, the Corporation has recourse to the dealer. The deferred payments are made by the purchaser direct to the Acceptance Corporation. This relieves the dealer of all the details of collection, and enables him to concentrate his time and energy on sales.

**Electric Refrigeration.**—Through its subsidiary, Frigidaire Corporation, General Motors looms large in another growing industry—the manufacture and distribution of refrigerating equipment. The electric refrigerator has been under experimentation for at least thirty years, but has reached the point of practical utility and general salability only recently. Frigidaire, which was one of the earliest of the mechanical refrigeration enterprises, handles its domestic distribution through two channels—"distributors" and direct factory sales branches.

Frigidaire's regular terms to distributors are sight draft against bill of lading, but shipments may be handled by the "G. M. A. C. plan," if the distributor so desires. The distributors, in turn, market the product through utility companies, dealers, and salesmen. Standard terms to utility companies are net cash 10th prox.; to dealers, sight draft against bill of lading. But either of these may, if they desire, take advantage of the G. M. A. C. plan. The salesmen generally operate from the headquarters city of a distributor, and the distributor himself carries the open account until it is closed either by cash or by the G. M. A. C. plan. The con-

sumer is offered a choice of three methods of payment: (1) cash; (2) note, handled through local bank; (3) deferred payments, handled through G. M. A. C.

**Kelvinator System.**—Another of the leading refrigeration enterprises, the Kelvinator Corporation, sells through branch offices in the larger cities and also direct through the home office in Detroit. Each branch office has its own credit department, responsible to the general credit manager in Detroit. New dealers are sold on terms of sight draft against bill of lading. After they are well established, they are allowed to pay ten days after date of shipment. Dealers whose sales ability and financial competence have been thoroughly tested are given a contract which calls for a cash payment of only 10 per cent, the balance being payable on notes within 90 days' time. These notes are payable at the customer's bank.

As the Kelvinator dealer receives but 20 per cent in cash from the ordinary customer at the time of installation, unless he is particularly fortunate in the possession of working capital he is likely to need help in financing his operations. This is provided by a subsidiary organization, the Refrigerating Discount Corporation, which bears the same relation to Kelvinator that G. M. A. C. does to General Motors.

**Dealings with Contractors.**—All of the refrigeration companies sell equipment in large quantities to building contractors, and because of the special risks connected with building operations it is necessary to hold firmly to a conservative credit policy. Kelvinator's terms to contractors are 85 per cent ten days after the month of installation and the remaining 15 per cent in thirty days. In appraising these risks Kelvinator assembles not only banking and commercial rating information but also a considerable amount of real estate data.

**Making a "Clean Sale."**—Good credit and collection psychology is found in the following suggestion sent by F. O. Pansing, credit manager of the Frigidaire Corporation at Dayton, to the company's distributors:

A sale should be clean, with no "strings" to it. It frequently happens that numerous promises are made by the dealer or salesman at the time the order is taken, but which do not for some reason appear on the order. Obviously this makes it very difficult to handle at the time of collection.

To sell terms or do anything irregular, merely to get the product out, cheapens the product and does not tend to build goodwill. Terms should be quoted without any apology, because all legitimate business is entitled to a fair profit if it expects to continue and be in business at a time when the customer may need to have service on his product.

When an order is received it should be acknowledged to the customer. This will not only confirm the order but will have a tendency to clear up any misunderstandings which might be in the mind of the purchaser, as well as assure the distributor that the orders are bona fide.

This applies particularly to those orders received from salesmen with whom you may have an arrangement to advance a part of the commission at the time the order is received.

After a good clean sale is made it must be delivered and installed. Installation should be made as soon after delivery as possible. Your installation men should realize that upon them depends, in a great measure, whether the customer is satisfied or dissatisfied. It means more than merely building a concrete base or making certain plumbing and electrical connections. After the installation is made in a satisfactory manner, collection can be made more promptly and you are enabled to hold your investment to a minimum, which means so much from an operating standpoint.

**Making Collections.**—After making the points of a clean sale and proper installation, Mr. Pansing gives his distributors the following specific suggestions concerning collections:

The following is the procedure which we use in the branches, and which we believe will be of assistance to you:

1. Promptly forward an invoice to the purchaser as soon as delivery has been made. This will, of course, carry the exact terms of sale as shown on the order.

2. If payment is not made promptly in accordance with the terms shown on the invoice, a statement should be forwarded promptly to the purchaser.

3. If the statement does not bring about the settlement of the account within seven days, write the purchaser the following letter:

Dear Sir:

It is generally recognized that failure to pay an account is due to an oversight much more frequently than refusal or inability to pay. This, we believe, is true in this case.

Will you be good enough to review this account? If this statement agrees with your records, your check in payment at this time will be appreciated.

If payment is being withheld for any reason with which we may not be familiar, kindly let us know so that proper attention may be given, as we want to serve our customers in the best manner possible. We are quite sure that you appreciate the reasonableness of our request.

Very truly yours,

**Further Collection Procedure.**—The letter just quoted is recommended for use when no attention has been paid to either the invoice or statement mailed to the customer. The procedure then continues:

4. If the letter does not bring results within five days, get in touch with the customer by telephone or personal call and collect in accordance with the terms as stated on the order. If, as a last resort, the customer is unable to pay cash, even though the terms specify cash, settlement should be made on the G. M. A. C. plan.

5. If settlement is not made at the time of the personal call or within three days after the telephone call, the salesman who made the sale should endeavor to make collection.

6. If none of these collection efforts proves successful, write the following letter:

Dear Sir:

We have received no response to our repeated communications in regard to your outstanding balance of \$ . . . . ., as shown on the enclosed statement.

We have tried to be reasonable in our requests and the handling of this account, but we simply cannot allow this balance to remain open any longer.

Unless we receive settlement by . . . . ., we shall feel obliged to place your account in the hands of our attorney for collection. We trust that you will appreciate the reasonableness of our position in the matter and that you will make it unnecessary for us to take this action, which would be expensive and unpleasant for both of us.

Very truly yours,

7. If this does not bring results, the matter should be promptly referred to your attorney for final disposition.

This entire procedure applies to the collection of city accounts and may be used also in any sub-branches you may have outside of your home city.

In your provincial territory, where most of your business is handled through dealers on a sight draft against bill of lading basis, this collection procedure may be used to good advantage by them in the collection of their own accounts.

**Furniture.**—In the furniture trade, which was the first to make extensive use of collections on the deferred payment plan, the collection problem is now overshadowed by a greater one—that of inducing people to buy furniture on any terms whatever. The entire attitude toward the buying of furniture has changed materially since Cowperthwait and Sons began doing business on the instalment plan more than a century ago.

Back in 1807 there was such a thing as the family, and it spent a great deal of time at home. Proper furniture for the parlor, dining-room, and sleeping rooms was a first charge on the family budget. The buying of a new “set” was an event. Today a great many people care little whether they have furniture or not. They spend most of their non-working hours in automobiles, theatres, and restaurants. Their money goes for these things instead of for tables, chairs, and what-nots.

As a result, both the manufacture and the distribution of furniture are in a chaotic condition. Reduced prices do not help much. The sad fact is that the demand for furniture has almost disappeared. In a middle western city, where the income of the head of the family averaged \$7.00 a day, a recent survey showed that only \$88.55, or 5.2 per cent of the annual budget, was spent for furniture.

On such business as is left, furniture sales are still based largely on instalment terms. Collections are slow. Gasoline, restaurant meals, and theatre tickets must be paid for in cash. The furniture dealer has to wait. The best he can do is to use the newest and most vigorous methods of collection follow-up and be thankful that he is able to remain in business at all.

**Radio and Phonographs.**—Fortunately, many furniture dealers have found a way out of their difficulty by turning their chief sales efforts in a new direction, and taking advantage of the present disposition of buyers to do without necessities in order to obtain the coveted luxuries. Collections on sales of radio sets and talking-machines may have their puzzling problems, particularly in times of general unemployment, but at least the dealer is able to make some sales on which to attempt collection.

Sales of radio sets and phonographs, and combinations of the two, are generally made to buyers who live comparatively near the point where the sales are made. This fact gives a distinctly personal tone to the entire collection process. Invoices and statements may be easily followed up by personal or telephone calls. Some dealers in this trade have virtually done away with the sending of statements on instalment accounts through the mail. It is just as easy, and frequently more effective, to call a customer on the telephone and say: "There is \$10.00 due on your radio set tomorrow. Will you mail it or bring it in, or shall we have a man drop in and get it, and at the same time see if your set is working properly?" This has the added advantage of combining a service with the collection function, and helps the collection process materially.

In the case of customers living at a distance from the sales point, the usual system of invoices, statements, and follow-up is used. And as in the case of all instalment collections, the dealer who gets the best results is the one who applies the most vigorous, systematic and at the same time good-natured pressure.

**Electrical Equipment.**—The past few years have seen an amazing extension of the application of electricity to the lightening of hand-labor in the home, and particularly on the farm. Today the farmer pushes a switch button and an electrically-driven machine milks the cows; another separates the cream; and still another churns the butter. The housewife gets breakfast easily by the help of the electric toaster, percolator, and range.

This industry, one of the few having vitality enough to achieve expansion even in a period of depression, is growing literally by leaps and bounds. It took twenty years to sell the American people the first million electric ranges. The second million will, in all probability, be marketed in the next three years.

The phenomenal expansion of the electrical equipment trade has, of course, brought its own credit and collection problems. As the average price of the equipment is fairly high, the marketing scheme has naturally gravitated in the direction of the deferred payment plan.

The problem of credit appraisal is a difficult one, particularly as so many of the buyers are in the rural sections of the country, where over-production and consequent low prices for farm products have made money scarce and debts hard to collect. Nevertheless, by using modern and effective instalment methods, the electrical equipment companies have been able, on the whole, to do exceedingly well.

One important factor favors them—satisfied customers. Gratitude for release from disagreeable hand-work puts the buyer in such a cooperative frame of mind that he is virtually sure to meet his payments on electrical equipment promptly as they come due.

**Pianos and Other Musical Instruments.**—As indicated in the summary of "Cleveland terms" on page 261, the piano trade shows the smallest percentage of down payment and the longest period of time allowed for completion of payment (30 months). This situation arises naturally from the fact that the piano is an exceptionally high-priced product, as well as one in which depreciation is comparatively slow.

Two factors have seriously disturbed conditions in the musical instrument trade in recent years. First, the development of radio broadcasting. When one may hear good music over the air at almost any time of day or night, the urge to have an instrument in one's own home is decidedly weakened. The other factor is the provision of excellent music in thousands of theatres and motion picture houses. In these two



ways the desire of the average citizen for musical entertainment is satisfied without the outlay of several hundred or a thousand dollars for a piano.

When pianos are sold side-by-side with radio sets, as is the case in many retail stores, radio appears to have a decided advantage. The United States Department of Commerce recently made a survey of 18 stores in Washington, D. C., with combined sales for the year of \$3,179,679. Of the sales recorded, about 26 per cent were of pianos and more than 53 per cent of radio sets.

Instalment collections on pianos are favored by two important factors—the size of the product, which makes it difficult to conceal or carry away, and the natural unwillingness of the customer to relinquish an impressive piece of equipment on which he has made substantial payments. As in the case of the other products referred to above, successful collections on piano and other musical instrument sales depend on a good system, carefully, persistently, and tactfully followed up.

**Washing Machines.**—Another device which has done much to ease the housewife's burden is the washing machine, which is now found in thousands of homes, urban and rural, as well as in clubs, hotels, hospitals, and other buildings devoted to public use.

These machines are divided into two classes as regards both function and motor power. One class is designed for the washing of fabrics; one for the cleansing of table-ware and kitchen utensils. As to power, it may be electric or hydraulic, but in either case the back, hands, and arms of the housewife or domestic servant reap the benefit.

The sale of washing machines has been appreciably increased by advertising featuring such factors as the time released for other work, or for recreation; the ease of operation; the reasonable price and the convenient terms of payment. Radio advertising has been used to a considerable extent, notably in the marketing of the Maytag line of products.

The down payment is low—usually about 10 per cent of the purchase price. A full year is generally allowed for comple-

tion of the instalment payments, and collections, as in the case of household electrical equipment, are helped by the fact that the customers are satisfied with the product.

In case of difficult collections, resale argument is particularly effective. The average buyer purchases the washing machine as a means of escape from drudgery, and will generally manage to find some means of meeting the scheduled payments rather than go back to a slavery from which he (or more frequently, *she*) has once been emancipated.

**Clothing.**—One of the most spectacular applications of the instalment principle is now to be seen in the sale of clothing at retail. This movement may be said to date from the year 1925, when the firm of Alfred Decker and Cohn suggested it to a group of retail dealers in clothing.

A careful and discriminating study of this plan has been made by H. D. Comer of the Ohio State University Bureau of Business Research, whose report indicates that the arrangement most frequently made is for a 25 per cent down payment, the balance to be met in equal payments spread over ten weeks. From 3 to 6 per cent is added as a carrying charge, and it is found that the operation of the plan adds about 6 per cent to the sales expense account.

While this arrangement, generally referred to as the "ten payment plan," has increased clothing sales, it has also accomplished another result in which the credit and collection department is vitally interested. It has appreciably reduced the amount carried on the books in the form of accounts receivable.

Under this plan the customer is fairly certain to liquidate his entire indebtedness in ten weeks. Under the open book account system he might let his bill run for months without making even a partial payment. The experience of retail clothiers who have tried this plan is that it reduces outstandings at least 50 per cent.

## CHAPTER 28

### COLLECTIONS FOR PUBLICATIONS AND CORRESPONDENCE COURSES

**General Publications.**—Book publishers discovered many years ago that expensive sets of books must be marketed on the instalment plan. Typical of their experience is that of a nationally known publisher whose largest set sells for \$150, with monthly instalments running for two years. The average instalment payment, however, is about \$3 a month.

This concern has estimated its risks and losses, verified them from experience, and arranged its marketing plan, including prices, to correspond. The outstanding features are:

1. Conservative sales and advertising policies.
2. Service accompanying many books, showing their use.
3. Reports on all new accounts.
4. Courteous treatment in the early stages of collection; severe treatment later.
5. Ledger cards with follow-up notations on the back.

**Beginning Gently.**—With a view to avoiding trouble on later instalments, and retaining goodwill as a basis for the sale of other books, mild letters are used in the early stages of collection. The follow-up system provides for fifteen-day intervals, and consists of a first and second notice accompanying statements, followed by four multigraphed form letters. Frequently a special cash offer is made with the second statement, to induce prompt payment. If at the end of three months no payment has been made, the account is charged up as a loss to the department against its reserve. Individually typed letters, based on a paragraph form-book, are then employed for collection, and anything secured after this time is, of course, put into the reserve. The life of all forms is three

months, after which they are revised, so that no delinquent ever receives the same form twice.

**The First Resale.**—The letter acknowledging the new account resells the books and explains the terms of payment.

Dear Sir:

We thank you for the account which you have just opened, and shall endeavor at all times to make our business dealings most pleasing to you.

We hope that you will give the volumes covered by the enclosed invoice a very careful examination, as we are confident that there is a wealth of information and enjoyment to be found in their pages, and that you will never regret your purchase.

There are two ways of paying for these books as you will see by the bill, either cash in one payment, for which a liberal discount is allowed, or in regular monthly instalments. If you choose the latter method, which is perfectly satisfactory to us, you will receive a statement of your account on the first of each month.

If questions or misunderstandings arise, and you will address the writer personally, he will be only too happy to place himself at your disposal.

Cordially yours,

.....  
THE COLLECTION MAN

**The Appeal to Fair Play.**—In the personal letters issued, following the printed forms, the collection man makes interesting use of various appeals. This one appeals to fair play.

Dear Sir:

Have we failed or have you?

We appeal to your sense of fairness for the answer.

If you have not received everything which your order entitled you to—if you have written us your complaint and we have failed to adjust it to your satisfaction—then we are to blame. Our intentions are good, however, and if you will state your case right on the back of this letter, we will promise satisfaction.

That is fair, is it not?

You will be fair, too, we know. If our part of the contract has been fulfilled—if payments have not been made merely because you put it off or forgot, then you will make it right, we are sure.

To bring your account up to date will require a remittance of  
\$.....

Just return this letter with your remittance, and we will know that you are another American who believes in a square deal.

Yours very truly,

**For Apparently Hopeless Cases.**—Another letter which is reserved especially for apparently hopeless cases is the following:

Dear Sir:

This morning my assistant showed me a list of all accounts on books showing more than two payments in arrears. "Turn them over to our attorney," he said, "for those who allow their accounts to slip that far behind, do not intend to pay." "I can't agree with you," I said, "these people are good, and I am sure of it. Give them ten days and they will prove it to you."

Was I right?

You still owe us a little balance of \$. . . . . Surely after going as far as you have you are not going to flunk out. You are not going to compel us to tell the judge about it in order to get our money. Of course not. Mail a check to us now and show the credit man that he is mistaken. Don't bother to write a letter, just pin your check to this sheet and send it NOW.

Yours very truly,

**For Extreme Cases.**—The following short but pointed letter is said occasionally to be effective in extreme cases of doubtful accounts.

Dear Sir:

Honest men pay their just debts.

Dishonest men do not pay their just debts.

You owe us \$ . . . .

Which are you?

Yours very truly,

**Before Taking Legal Action.**—When a warning has already been sent that legal action will be commenced, the following letter may be employed with a customer whose credit risk is apparently good. It asks for a friendly man-

to-man understanding and appeals to cooperation, while at the same time it points out the inexorable nature of the action that has been ordered.

Dear Sir:

If it were possible for you and me to get together for just a few minutes I am sure that we would soon be able to straighten out your account with this company, but as this is a physical impossibility, cannot it be done by mail?

You will remember that on ..... you purchased a set of ..... for which you agreed to pay \$. . . . as follows: . . . . .

However, for some reason unknown to us, your payments have not been kept up as agreed, and at the present time there is \$ . . . . past due.

Will you kindly use the enclosed envelope, and write me a personal letter stating your side of the case, advising me if possible just how we may expect you to settle this account, and if you can, accompany your reply with at least a dollar in order that it may be possible to keep your name in good standing on our books.

I offer this chance to save yourself needless expense and embarrassment which results from legal action which is ordered to begin against you two weeks from today. Will you grasp the opportunity?

I shall be looking for your letter. With kindest regards and best wishes, I am,

Very truly yours,

**The Follow-Up.**—If this is not answered the company follows it with a letter based on the assumption that the customer is deliberately withholding payment.

Dear Sir:

Two weeks ago I wrote what I thought (and meant to be) a courteous letter that called for an answer on your part. I asked that you tell me frankly what the trouble was with your account, for I felt sure that it could be easily adjusted. You have not answered my letter.

Apparently you are neither negligent nor careless. It appears that you intend to keep the books, and default on the payments. Perhaps you will be successful. If you think it worth the effort, you might try, but we caution you that every effort will be made by us and by our agents to force payment.

You bought a set of ..... costing \$. . . . . You have paid \$. . . . ., and now owe us \$. . . . .

Yours very truly,

**Ultimatum No. 1.**—Examples of final letters that may be used to offer the customer a last chance before action is begun are the following:

Dear Sir:

Your account being still unpaid, Attorneys . . . . . have asked us for permission to bring suit against you. We have requested them to suspend action only until you have had one final opportunity of remitting voluntarily to us direct.

We are absolutely at a loss to understand your silence. It is possible that you have apparently some good reason for not remitting for your purchase, but surely you have no legitimate excuse for refusing us an explanation.

We have tried to be courteous and square in our dealings with you, but there is a point where courtesy ceases to be a virtue.

Unless we hear from you by return mail we shall allow the collection agency to take whatever steps may be necessary to effect settlement.

Yours very truly,

**Ultimatum No. 2.**—This letter is the last chance, after which the law takes its course.

Dear Sir:

We are this day wiring our corresponding attorney in your city to proceed with action against you on our claim amounting to \$. . . .

We have written repeatedly, giving you many extensions, but clients won't wait any longer. You have a day left within which to make settlement. Send check and wire or write us that you are doing so immediately. This is final. Govern yourself accordingly.

Yours very truly,

**An Unusual Credit Risk.**—The credit risk undertaken by another publisher selling an expensive set of reference books is most unusual. On the one hand this corporation deals in an article of unique reputation in which the public has confidence. On the other hand it deals in an article which, unfortunately for the good sense of mankind, is well known to present the toughest possible problem to the collector. To be successfully marketed, moreover, this set of books must be made to appeal to a great section of the general public which

would not dream of buying any other set one-half or perhaps even one-fourth as expensive. The books are, moreover, books of reference, which demand work if a man is to enjoy them. On the whole it is hard to imagine a collection problem having more elements of interest, especially when one remembers that the series of payments may extend over a period of years before final settlement has been made.

**The Sales Campaign.**—Whether the sale of a set of this character is undertaken by a salesman alone, or by salesmen and bookstores, or by these media with the additional assistance of an advertising campaign, the solicitation must be vigorous and persistent, and must leave no appeal untouched that is likely to secure interest in the books and final purchase.

In such a selling campaign, advertisements and salesmen should be careful not to oversell to the point of weakening the sense of credit responsibility in the customer. The salesman should be carefully trained to estimate the credit risk. If this is not done, if the salesman is allowed to let his eagerness to earn commissions override the carefully determined rules against taking irresponsible credits—no subsequent collection efforts will avail. The collection department must have a fairly sound basis to use as a fulcrum for its efforts. If this credit fulcrum does not exist the collection effort will be a disastrous failure. Resale of the goods, of the credit responsibility, and the method of payment must be carried on well into the collection period, as well as receiving thorough emphasis before the books are shipped.

In this collection campaign the principle of surprise and impulse dominates throughout, in that the procedure is so flexible that a delinquent customer can never be sure what step will be taken next. Skilful use is made of appeals to emotion and instinct as well as to the formation of habit. The appearance of the letters is studied in order to produce high attention value. Every letter issued is carefully adjusted to the prescribed condition it must meet. So far as possible, the situations which occur with comparative frequency in the ex-



## VERIFIER'S REPORT

NAME.....		DATE.....
RESIDENCE.....	PHONE No.....	LISTED.....
BUSINESS.....	PHONE No. ....	LISTED.....
RESIDENCE REPORT		BUSINESS REPORT
I CALLED AT.....	I CALLED AT. . . . .	
NEIGHBORHOOD.....	BUILDING. . . . .	
HOUSE.....	NEIGHBORHOOD.....	
	EMPLOYER OR EMPLOYED.....	
I INTERVIEWED.....	NAME OF FIRM.....	
RENT.....	BUSINESS.....	
MARRIED OR SINGLE.....	LARGE OR SMALL.....	
AGE.....	RATING.....	
HAS LIVED THERE.....	HOW LONG HERE.....	
LIVED PREVIOUSLY.....	RENT.....	
CREDIT STANDING.....	WHERE PREVIOUSLY.....	
BANK.....		
FROM INFORMATION RECEIVED AT THIS ADDRESS I BELIEVE ORDER.....		I INTERVIEWED.....
BECAUSE.....	SUB-EMPLOYED.....	
	HOW LONG.....	
	SALARY.....	
	WHERE PREVIOUSLY.....	
	PERMANENT OR TEMPORARY.....	
	FROM INFORMATION RECEIVED AT THIS ADDRESS, I BELIEVE ORDER...	
SIGNED.....	BECAUSE... ..	
	SIGNED.....	

## COLLECTION DEPARTMENT STATEMENT

I BELIEVE WE.....COLLECT THIS ACCOUNT BECAUSE.....

SIGNED.....

.....

## CREDIT DEPARTMENT STATEMENT

WE.....ACCEPT THIS ORDER BECAUSE.....

SIGNED.....

Figure 19. Verifier's Report

perience of the collection department are reduced to a routine and taken care of with the minimum of attention, although the whole process is constantly supervised and judgment is exercised as to the steps to be taken in any particular case.

A special school conducted by the credit manager teaches the salesman what classes of customers are likely to keep up an interest in the books sufficient to carry them through the period of payment. He is trained to judge by the location of a home and its furnishings, as well as by the characteristics of the prospective customer. In making the sales he receives the initial payment and carefully explains the credit risk and the methods of payment. In large cities the salesman is followed by a verifier whose special task is to check up the salesman's judgment as to credit reliability. His report is made on the basis of a call at the subscriber's residence and at his place of business. In some cities also a "downtown man" calls at the customer's place of business and secures information. This report is signed by the person who made it and countersigned by the collection department and credit department. In localities where no verifier is employed, inquiry forms may be sent to the town clerk, to a bank, to a prominent merchant, to the subscriber's employer or other reference, or to the subscriber direct. The assembled information is submitted to the credit man who either accepts it and fills out a ledger card or decides not to accept it and writes a diplomatic letter returning the customer's first payment.

With the following letter goes a record card which by underlined and capitalized statements shows an equally anxious desire that the customer shall understand with the utmost possible clearness just what his responsibilities in the matter of payment are. This publishing house, like many other houses selling on the instalment plan to a high grade of purchasers, has found that it costs less for the customer to remind himself of his monthly payment than to send him a statement. Many customers even find it an annoyance to receive monthly statements. Probably the record card system causes more

unintentional delinquency, but it is far easier to send a courteous reminder now and then to a forgetful customer than to send out numerous statements monthly.

Dear Subscriber:

We are glad to acknowledge receipt of your recent order. It will have our prompt attention and shipment will be made as soon as possible.

The books you have purchased are among the most valuable works in the English language. Their possession cannot help but be a source of much pleasure and benefit to every owner. And we congratulate you on your good judgment in placing this order.

Enclosed with this letter we are sending you your Record Card. Please read it carefully. We want to emphasize the following points:

- 
1. Please send payments regularly and in time to reach us on the date they fall due.
  2. Preserve your Record Card and enter on it every payment you make, so that you will know at all times exactly how your account stands.
  3. Advise us promptly of any change in address.
- 

Thanking you for the order, we are,

Yours very truly,

**General Plan of Collections.**—When an instalment fails to put in an appearance at the due date, the collection procedure begins and letters are sent at weekly intervals. The first two use courteous though urgent language, while the fourth, when a month has passed without a reply, makes it clear that unpleasant consequences will follow unless the payment is received. Thereafter the account goes through the hands of a special adjuster who first warns of a draft, then draws, notifying the customer and urging payment, and then, if the draft is refused, threatens suit.

At this stage three courses lie open to the collection manager. He may send the claim direct to an attorney in the subscriber's locality, but he is more likely to try the effect of a strong letter from a collection agency operated by his own

department accompanied by an agency draft and letter to the subscriber's local bank. A third course is to send a letter from the general manager which courteously expresses the opinion that there has been a mistake and offers to keep the account out of the attorney's hands until the subscriber has had a chance to explain to him personally.

If the credit has been considered reasonably good and the account looks collectible, the manager is likely to send the "general manager" letter, the "private agency" letter, and then to turn the claim over to the attorney. But if the credit looks weak, he is likely to follow the agency letter with correspondence directed towards securing the return of the goods, in which case, of course, the subscriber loses the payments already made. Naturally the company prefers to adopt other methods before taking this last resort, but it "pulls the books" unhesitatingly if this seems the best course.

**Correspondence School Collections.**—The principle of continual resale lies behind the success of the correspondence schools which sell to their subscribers not only a set of books to be paid for on the instalment plan, but sell also the service consisting of lectures, assignments, etc., each one of which is so prepared as to encourage the subscriber to continue his work in the course.

The collection department of one such organization has two divisions, the collection division and the credit division. The first handles all good accounts and a considerable part of the routine of the second. If a subscriber falls behind in his payments, he is considered good for two months—if he is on a six-day mailing schedule. If he makes a payment, he is reinstated. If he again becomes delinquent after three reminders, his account is put on probation. All delinquent and probation accounts and all correspondence from subscribers in connection with good accounts are handled by the credit division. As soon as an account comes to the credit division from the collection division, reports and information are obtained at once from every possible quarter. Salesmen

are written to and local attorneys consulted. All this is in addition to the reports made by the salesman at the time of sale.

The attitude of the company is distinctly personal with each customer; each case is treated on its merits and goodwill is safeguarded by unusual leniency. Cancellations are never allowed because the company's contract forces it to pay out money at once for books, service, etc.

Every letter works for a reply as well as for a payment in order to increase the personal touch with the customer. The usual reasons given for nonpayment are, that the subscriber has no time to read the course, he has no money, he has been ill, he is out of a job, he has suffered an accident, he is dissatisfied; or he gives evidence of having lost his ambition. The company may suggest a reduction in the payment schedule, or a brief extension of time. It urges that he is bound for his own sake as well as the dealer's, to live up to his contract, "*Every letter that we write,*" says the credit manager, "*is a selling letter.*"

This company employs its own collection agency. A reference to an attorney has been found inexpedient because it destroys goodwill. It is used, however, when no answer is received, or when the customer is defiant, avows his intention to revoke his contract, or break his promises.

Certain interesting points in the collection procedure are worthy of note. The company's acknowledgment of the initial payment and the letter describing the terms of payment, both take occasion to resell the course and the credit obligations. A printed folder containing a fresh and interesting example of the value some subscriber has found in the course is mailed with every bill and with all reminders. This is remarkably effective in maintaining promptness in good customers. If any payment from a subscriber is accompanied by a letter, acknowledgment is made in a letter which contains a newsy paragraph of resale material.

A printed form is used for a second reminder:

Dear Sir:

Just a reminder that the current payment of \$. . . . on your account is overdue.

Don't bother to explain; we know how these things get by. Please attach your remittance to the stub and send it along today.

Cordially yours,

If you have already remitted by the time this reaches you, please disregard this reminder.

The stub contains the sentence:

Please tear off this stub and return it with your remittance; it will facilitate the proper crediting of your account.

When an account is giving trouble, a special letter is sent the subscriber from the service department, reselling the course, but making no reference to the overdue account.

Typical letters employed by this company are the following. Their breezy, cordial style suggests action and prevents offense.

*("Spring cleaning" letter)*

Dear Sir:

"Spring cleaning" is not just a matter of household routine. It's an annual, nationwide movement to clean up everything—the house, the office, the city.

In harmony with this spirit, you want to "clean up" the \$. . . . . on this month's fee.

It won't be necessary to write a letter. Just pin your check to the statement enclosed and send it along in the envelope within.

Yours very truly,

---

*("Do the first thing first" letter)*

Dear Sir:

A busy editor was asked recently how he managed to carry on an extensive correspondence, write several thousand words a day, and then deliver a talk in the evening. His answer suggests a good plan for every one. It was this: "I do the first thing first, and then keep right on doing."

Why not begin "doing" today by writing your check for \$. . . . . to cover the current payment on your enrolment fee?

The envelope enclosed is at your service.

Very truly yours,

*("Bank draft" letter No. 1)*

Dear Sir:

Unless you remind a man pretty often when a remittance is overdue, the next payment date comes around before he knows it. Then there are two payments to make at one time.

Take your own case, for example. Five reminders have already been sent you of the past-due payments. Up to this morning no response has been received from you in answer to any one of them.

No doubt you have either been too busy to attend to it before this or you may have been out of town. So as to make it as easy for you as possible to bring your account up to date, however, we shall deposit a draft for \$ . . . in your local bank to cover the . . . and . . . fees, unless your remittance or instructions not to draw reach us by return mail.

Yours very truly,

---

*("Bank draft" letter No. 2)*

Dear Sir:

Inasmuch as we have not heard from you in reply to our letter of . . . , we take it for granted that you want us to draw upon you through your local bank.

Accordingly, we have today drawn a draft on your bank for \$ . . . covering the . . . fee. The bank will notify you when the draft arrives.

If for any reason, you prefer to remit direct, a return envelope is enclosed for your convenience in doing so.

Yours very truly,

---

*("Unpaid draft" letter)*

Dear Sir:

Needless to say, we are surprised to find that our recent draft for \$ . . . to cover the past-due payment on the enrolment fee is still unpaid.

Either the bank has been very slow in reporting the collection to us, or you refused the draft.

If you paid the draft, we shall appreciate very much your writing and telling us when the draft was presented, so that we may be in a position to follow up the bank. If, on the other hand, you refused the draft we must ask you to send us a check for \$. . . at once, to bring your account up to date.

Please write us today.

Yours very truly,

The customer has asked to be released from his contract, pleading special circumstances. The treasurer replies :

Dear Sir:

I can readily appreciate that under the circumstances you mention there are many demands on your pocketbook and that it will mean a good deal of a sacrifice to maintain the regular tuition payments due to us.

It is natural perhaps that in thinking of retrenching, the first thing you hit upon is the monthly payment of \$ . . . . due on the Course.

But right there, Mr. . . . . ., is where you make a serious mistake.

When you stop to think about it, the . . . . . Course if ever needed is needed now; it fortifies you against just such circumstances as you describe.

Rightly and persistently followed it will gradually broaden and deepen your knowledge of the essentials of business and put into your hands the equipment of tools by which you can carve out a niche for yourself that no one can crowd you out of.

It would certainly be short-sighted on your part, now of all times, to stop in your time of need and literally kick out from under your feet the ladder by which you will be able to climb to better things.

I know how you feel about gradually getting behind on payments, and I am glad you wrote to me as you did, because we can get together and arrange matters so that you may yet keep in good standing with us.

Suppose you tell me how much you can send each month from now on, without undue strain on your resources. Then I shall try to meet you half-way and we can continue as before to our mutual advantage.

I can promise to do almost anything in the way of an adjustment of terms to your present condition, except allow a cancellation. Don't ask me to do that, for the contract expressly forbids it.

Think this matter over in the light in which I have presented it to you, and you will agree with me I am sure.

I shall expect to hear from you by return mail in order that I may make the arrangements necessary for taking care of this matter.

Sincerely yours,



## CHAPTER 29

### THE BASIS OF RETAIL CREDITS AND COLLECTIONS

**The Service Given by the Retail Store.**—The basis of the retailer's position in the community is service, an important part of which is his charge account service. In collections as well as in sales and advertising, it is his business to sell the service of his store, and not merely the goods he handles.

The foregoing statements are the basis of all retail collection.

The strength of the retail store is its service. The stock of goods has been collected with a thorough understanding of local needs. The location is convenient where men and women can drop in as they are passing by or can telephone their orders and have them delivered. The proprietor and his clerks have the opportunity of knowing all their customers personally and of catering year after year to their individual needs.

It is the business of the retail merchant to make friends for his store, not on the basis of price alone, but through good values, prompt and courteous attention, and a complete and well-selected stock. Its success will be based not on these factors alone but also on its sound financing, accurate accounting, careful study to determine what lines and what activities are really profitable, and vigorous endeavors by means of the right kind of advertising to enlarge or at least to maintain the store's volume of business. It is necessary to avoid overbuying, to make rapid turnover, and keep down expenses, and last but not least to maintain prompt, energetic, and intelligent collection. Every item of a store's efficiency is of value to its customers, since only by these means can it maintain a high grade of service. Every one of the foregoing items has its place in advertising and sales. They can, likewise, be used again and again in collections.

**Teaching Customers to Appreciate Retail Service.**—The principle of resale is nearly as important to the retail merchant as it is to the jobber or manufacturer. On the one hand he is dealing with customers who have little or no knowledge of business principles, who do not realize the nature of the service they are receiving and who consequently are likely to treat their obligations carelessly, unless these are explained to them. On the other hand, his customers' very unfamiliarity with business methods increases the retail merchant's difficulty and even embarrassment in talking about them.

Under present conditions, however, some rudiments of the knowledge of the retail business are being forced upon the attention of even the most careless retail purchaser. Suggestions relative to the carrying of small parcels, and urging customers not to abuse the return-goods privilege have been spread abroad through department store advertising and magazine articles. There has been much discussion and some actual trial of the cash-and-carry plan.

As a result of these few circumstances it is gradually being forced into the consciousness of the retail buyer that the service of local merchants in providing convenient stocks of goods, maintaining free delivery, and carrying charge accounts, has a value in dollars and cents; that it is very annoying to be deprived of any portion of that service; and that reasonable care on their part will increase the merchant's ability to continue this service at high efficiency.

**Selling Credit.**—In retail credits and collections, therefore, there is a splendid opportunity for a resale of the service of the store, showing customers that it is to their advantage to help maintain it by prompt payment. Moreover, when securing new customers, the retailer, like the jobber, needs to "sell credit."

The resale attitude is even easier for the retailer to adopt than for the jobber or manufacturer, for the retail proprietor or manager is usually head salesman and head credit man rolled into one and finds it easy to talk about his store service. The bug-bear of the retailer in collection, moreover, is the

fear of offending his customers and driving away trade, and the only collection method he knows is some variation of the appeal to fear. The result is that he doesn't collect, because he knows well enough that his business is to make friends. But when he has grasped the possibilities of resale, he has found the way to collect the money due him without giving offense.

**The Retailer Does a Credit Business at a Cash Price.—**

"If you walk into the average retail store," said a well-known business man, "and ask them if they do a credit business, some of them will say, 'Yes, of course we do.' Others will say, 'No, but we carry charge accounts for some of our best customers as an accommodation.' But even the second speaker may be carrying his customers 60 or 90 days or even more, so that he is really doing a credit business. The fallacy and the danger of his position is that he is doing this credit business at a cash price.

"If you ask a jobber or manufacturer whether he does a credit business, he will answer, 'Yes, we have a credit price which is net 60 days. Also we have a cash price which is 2 per cent lower.' It may be even 5 per cent lower. The unexplained problem is then, why does the retailer do a credit business at a cash price?"

Perhaps the nearest approach to an answer that can be given is that the customers do not understand the situation, and the retailer hesitates to explain it to them. This is because he knows that the charge account privilege is a powerful asset in his business. It gets him customers who find it an annoyance to pay cash with every purchase. It stabilizes his business, enabling him to estimate the amount of his future sales, and to buy accordingly, because charge customers are repeat customers. It enlarges his sales to individuals because the majority of retail purchasers restrict their credit purchases to a few stores in a given line, knowing full well that it is harder to keep track of one's expenditures if they are scattered over a number of stores. Also the charge account encourages individuals to buy more by making purchase easier,

since the unpleasantness of parting with one's money is postponed. On this account some believe that, as a check on needless spending, all retail buying should be strictly for cash. But advocates of this method are usually men who have a strong belief in the natural extravagance of womankind, and who would be the last to advocate a cash basis for their own business transactions. The woman of America is the chief retail purchaser of America, and she has come to appreciate the convenience of a charge account. Many of her reasons are the same as those influencing business men to use credit.

The retail merchant's charge account, then, is to be looked on as a service granted to his customers, and maintained for the purpose of enlarging his business. He may abandon it and put his store on a cash basis for various special reasons or as an emergency measure, but under ordinary circumstances, if he has sufficient capital, he will continue to allow goods to be charged and paid for at the end of the month.

If the service becomes too expensive by reason of poor collection, the remedy is to correct collection methods rather than abandon a legitimate source of profitable business.

"With a good collection system," says a wise retailer, "I can allow charge accounts *within certain limits* to nearly everybody; I can keep down my prices to meet out-of-town competition; I can give service that will beat any competition; and I can make *friends* by the collection letters I write. Impossible, you say? But I can show you the results."

**Loose Credit Appraisal.**—There can hardly be any question that a great weakness of the retailer is his looseness in credit appraisal. "He finds it easier," says a bulletin of the National Association of Credit Men, "to increase his line of credit with the wholesaler than to collect money from his customers. He does not give sufficient attention to the character and paying quality of his customers. He will take risk after risk without information on these points."

It is perfectly easy to understand why the retailer finds it uncomfortable to obtain credit information and to make the proper impression on the customer's mind at the time of the

credit interview. He wrongly looks on it as a non-productive occupation, just as executives in other lines of business sometimes look on the work of the credit and collection departments as non-productive. There is no money in it, he thinks. He believes he can pick up the information he needs as time goes on. And he is, to put it frankly, afraid to say a word about credit lest he give offense and drive the customer away. But let him once look on the problem as an opportunity for making a sale that may mean thousands of dollars during the next several years, and he will no longer consider it a non-productive occupation.

**"Selling" a Retail Charge Account.**—"When new customers come into my store," said a prosperous retail merchant, "I 'sell them the store' and I 'sell them credit.' I let them see that the two are connected. All requests for credit are referred directly to me. Then I have the chance to give the new customers a hearty welcome, and start right in to tell them what the store can do for them. I take a step or two out to the aisle where we can see some of the interesting features of the store. Then I ask, 'Have you been in town long?' I tell them right away, without appearing to notice their answers, how long I have been in business and how the town has changed in those years. Then it is natural to show how the business has grown and to tell about some of the lines we handle. In between, I am asking questions about the customers' location, nature of employment, past location and employment, employers' names and how things are going. If the people are strangers in town, I can often give them helpful suggestions, though I take pains not to overdo this. I should have said that I always introduce the customers to the clerk who brought them back to my desk and to one or two of the other clerks, if I get a chance. If the clerk has already made the sale, he has instructions to get out of the way as fast as possible after this introduction, so as not to seem officious. If he has not made the sale, I end by turning the customer over to him. Then I call attention to some article that is plainly price-marked and show it as an example

of the kind of goods we handle and the prices we set. It is easy to talk about the high cost of living and the efforts this store is making to reduce expenses and keep prices as low as possible. You understand that I don't always go through the full performance. But sometimes, when the man or woman gets interested, it is surprising how long a conversation we have. A waste of time? Why, I figure that a fifteen-minute conversation of this kind may mean a \$10,000 sale or more. I'm *selling the store*. If that man or woman does business with me for the next ten or twenty years, as may be the case, it is wonderfully helped by the favorable first impression made at that interview.

"By the time this conversation is finished—and you may be sure I cut it short, if the customers show the least sign of being in a hurry—we always step back to my desk where I ask two or three definite questions and put them down on a card. The customers see me doing this but do not sit where they can see the card. I confine these formal questions to the amount of income, which I never fail to ask, and to any other absolutely necessary data which my conversation has not brought out. Sometimes the question about income is the only one I ask at this point. Then I state the terms of the store, always in the same way. 'We will send you a record of each purchase at the time of delivery so you can be sure you got what you ordered. Then we send an itemized statement at the end of the month. Payment is due at that time.' After that, very often, it is possible to say a few words about how glad I am to have good charge account customers and what splendid people I have the privilege of doing business with.

"I have to guard against making this interview too long on the sales side, for fear that the customers will think I am trying to make them buy something they don't want. Also I am exceedingly careful not to say too much about the charge account. And almost everything I do say is said impersonally, with reference to general conditions in the town and my experience. Then, too, I always 'sell them the store.' If the credit looks pretty weak, I say something about people who are regular

customers of other stores but who come in frequently to us and pay cash because they like our goods, our service, and our prices. In this case, too, I make the formal interview at my desk just a little longer and make it cover more ground. Then no matter what sort of credit limit I put on purchases, or even if I refuse credit accommodation altogether, I have done my best to make good friends for the store."

**What Is the Meaning of a Charge Account?**—There are two reasons why the retailer cannot extend credit accommodation to his customers in the same way that a wholesaler or a manufacturer does to him. In the first place, while the retailer's amount of ready cash or liquid assets may be considerably less than the amount of his purchases, still he has other assets which he can either liquidate fully or which will be productive of some income within the credit period accorded by the wholesaler and manufacturer. These sellers calculate that the retailer's normal expectation of business for the season will reach a certain sum and that, accordingly, his purchases for that season from all sources should reach a certain proportion of his total expectancy. Among the items on which their calculation is based, is, for example, the stock on hand. The reason credit can be extended partly on the basis of these goods is that they grow more valuable while in the possession of the retail merchant. When they come to be sold, his customers pay him for his trouble in selecting them, buying them, storing them until they are wanted, and selling them in the small quantities desired by each consumer.

The goods bought by the ordinary customer cannot be made the basis of retail credit in the same way as those bought by the merchant, because they are not productive of income. They do not grow more valuable, but less valuable, while they are in his hands. As the authorities on economics would say, the retailer adds a utility to the goods he handles, but the consumer destroys this utility.

For another reason, the retail merchant has not sufficient capital to carry on a credit business like that of some jobbers and manufacturers. The burden of carrying the long-time

credit obligations of his community should properly rest on the shoulders of the bank. The new trade acceptance plan helps the retail merchant in case of need to fall back on the bank with unusual ease.

There is every reason why a retailer should tactfully and courteously explain these matters to a customer who has been taking it for granted that he can allow his accounts to run or who is asking for unreasonable extensions of time. "I'd be glad to help you out with a personal loan if I had the money," he might say, "but the retail business isn't built on a basis that allows me to carry accounts indefinitely. Now, I just got an invoice of goods from Green and Company this morning—And, by the way, I want you to see those goods before you go. You don't want to buy them, I know, but I want you to see them because there are some mighty pretty patterns there and it's just a pleasure to look at them.—Well, now, Green and Company are going to give me credit accommodation on the basis of those goods because I shall sell them and shall sell other goods already on hand and pay Green and Company their bills. But it's ridiculous for me to think that you're going to sell your shoes, your hat, and the dishes off your table to pay my bills. No, the fact of it is, I figure my business on a thirty days' basis and establish my prices accordingly, and if I start out to carry people sixty or ninety days, I shall have to go to the bank and borrow the extra capital to do it with and add the interest charges to the prices of the goods I sell. Most of my customers won't stand for that, and we've got to treat everybody alike. You know how that is, yourself." Then he can offer to accept part payment, a note, or a trade acceptance.

**Objections to Long Retail Credits.**—The two foregoing reasons against retail credit, namely, (1) the retailer's comparative lack of capital, and (2) the fact that the consumer destroys the utility of the goods he buys so that they cannot be considered a basis for credit, can, as has been shown, be tactfully presented to customers. Another fundamental reason which cannot be so easily discussed lies in the different nature of the credit risk. The retailer is definitely established in a



particular location and has made a considerable investment, the value of which is entirely dependent on his staying there for a considerable time. Detailed information concerning the state of his business can be obtained from which can be formed a very accurate estimate as to the amount of risk he may venture upon. But the retail customer is not so much a fixture in the community. He can, theoretically at least, pack up his personal belongings and leave for parts unknown. It is almost impossible, moreover, to tell from outward appearances the amount of his income and his ability to pay.

It may be argued that in communities which are fortunate in having a well-established credit bureau the financial status of a large number of citizens is accurately known, so that long-time credit accommodation can be granted them, and they, being well-to-do citizens, can pay the consequent high prices. But if this theory is carried into practice, it works hardship to all the members of the community who are less able to pay, to the small-salaried people and to the laborers on wages that barely permit them and their wives and children to live from week to week. Long-time retail credits force prices up and are a grave injustice to the poor.

Still another objection to long retail credits lies in their relatively high expense as compared with wholesale credit. The labor of handling a great many small items runs up the retailer's cost of handling charge accounts to such a high figure under the best of conditions that he dare not inflict on his business the heavy burden of tying up considerable sums of his capital unproductively. Those thousands of dollars should be reinvested in his business and earning money for him.

**The Reason for 30-Day Credit.**—The retailer cannot do a credit business. The charge account system is merely a convenience for the store's customers. The usual retail store has not enough capital to finance the social plungers of the community—a highly hazardous business for any financier. It assumes that its customer is anticipating his purchases by not more than 30 days, since this is the usual time when retail customers receive their own salaries or wages, or have their

own bills paid if they are professional men. The theory is that the customer either has the cash in his pocket, but wants to avoid the bother of pulling it out, or that he has it in the bank and prefers to save time by drawing all his checks at a single time ; or that he does not himself receive payment for the services he performs in the present month until the first of the next month, and that consequently he does not pay for services received or goods received until the same time. In other words, he trusts his employer for 30 days and the retailers of the town, in like manner, trust him for 30 days.

## CHAPTER 30

### COLLECTION METHODS OF RETAIL MERCHANTS

**The Retailer's Credit Record.**—The simplest sort of card-file will do for the average retailer, large or small, as a record of credit information. The items he needs especially are: full name and address, occupation, name and address of employers, if any, and amount and sources of income. He may also ask whether real estate is owned, and if so, by what member of the family and where the property is located; what securities are held; bank in which the customer has deposits; names of other stores with which the applicant does a credit business, and names of other references. While these latter items are worth knowing, they are seldom asked for except by stores in large cities, and then only in case purchases are likely to run to considerable amounts.

Some successful merchants make a practice of keeping card-records of every customer, whether cash or charge, with whom they do business, and use it primarily for sales information, though it contains necessary credit data as well. A few facts about the personality of the purchasing members of the family, their likes and dislikes in merchandise, and any important purchases, find equal space on these records together with the information whether the customer is slow pay or poor pay. The names and ages of children in the family are a valuable item.

**The Ruedebusch System.**—In the small town of Mayville, Wisconsin, is located a thriving retail store the proprietors of which hold positive views on the comparative merits of cash and credit. For their own use they have devised a system which is both easy to administer and certain to bring satisfactory results. The class of trade to which they sell is no

different from that of many other retailers. "We have charge accounts," they say "with very many classes of people; many good farmers and renters; hired men and hired girls; all kinds and classes of 'city people'; and a pretty large percentage of wage earners, working in Mayville industries.

"The very simple work on our system is done in leisure moments by the cashier. Our manager spends from one-half to one hour twice a month sitting in his easy chair and marking collection lists. No extra expense or trouble in all of this for us; there is, of course, some extra amount for postage, stationery, and letter-writing; but the total of this is but an insignificant amount in a year, and a great part of it is made up by saving time and stationery on petty accounts.

"The great saving for us through this system comes in the following: \$180 per year saved on interest (the same volume of credit business done with \$3,000 less investment)—and several times that amount saved annually on losses and collection expenses. By far the greatest advantage, however, consists in still another thing: our former crude methods always caused considerable irritation on both sides and kept a lot of persons away from our store, while we now make all our charge accounts—even the uncollectible ones—bring us in extra trade.

"Nobody could ever induce our store to go back to the former ways, or to a spot cash or thirty days' limit basis, not by thousands of dollars."

The secretary of the company has prepared many such systems for other retailers, and knows whereof he speaks. "Positive terms," he says, "strictly applied to all customers are positively wrong for the small-town retailer. He should give credit accommodation to one man for a few days or a week only, demand monthly settlements from another, give a third several months to settle up, tell another that he need not pay at all until it suits him, and be very pleasant about it in every case, always showing that his main object is to serve and to accommodate every one as well and as much as possible." This retailer believes that a merchant who gives up his credit business simply helps the big mail-order concerns, and that he has no need to lose money in handling his charge accounts.

The basis of this system is first, a carefully specified collection system for the bookkeeper and another for the manager, prepared in detail and bound up with a book of specially prepared form letters covering every situation likely to arise, and classified under the headings of "Monthly Statement Accounts," "Extra Favor and Confidence Accounts," and "General Accounts." Separate treatment is given to Single Bills (accounts for only one sale) and Petty Accounts (accounts of \$2 or less). Under each of these headings is a series of letters closing in each case with a notification to the customer of some final disposal of his bill, whether this may mean sending it to a lawyer, or merely transferring it to Doubtful Accounts.

A portion of the contents of such a system prepared for a Wisconsin merchant runs as follows:

#### CORRESPONDENCE AND COLLECTING SYSTEM

##### *Monthly Statement Accounts ("M. S.")*

1. Introductory letter—requesting monthly settlement.
2. First request for payment.
3. Second request for payment.
4. Third request for payment.
5. Last request before going to lawyers for collection.  
500. Last request before transferring to "D. A."
6. Notice of transfer to D. A.

##### *Single Bills ("S. B.")*

7. First request for payment.
8. Second request for payment.
9. Last request before going to lawyers for collection.  
900. Last request before transferring to D. A.
10. Notice of transfer to D. A.

##### *Petty Accounts ("P")*

11. First request for payment—advertising letter.
12. Second request for payment.
13. Notice of transfer to D. A.

##### *Extra Favor and Confidence Accounts ("X")*

14. First request for payment.
15. Second request for payment.
16. Third request for payment.
17. Last request before transferring to D. A.
18. Notice of transfer to D. A.

*General Accounts ("G")*

19. First request for payment.
  20. Second request for payment.
  21. Third request for payment.
  22. Last request before going to lawyers for collection.  
2200. Last request before transferring to D. A.
  23. Notice of transfer to D. A.
- 

24. Notice that account has been given to lawyers.
25. Notice of withdrawal from lawyers and transfer to D. A.

At the end of the month the manager receives from the bookkeeper a sheet listing all collection accounts. One column on this sheet contains symbols showing what collection letter was last issued to this customer. The manager thereupon indicates in another column what letter he wishes next to use; or he dictates a special letter to fit the case; or makes some alteration in the usual form letter. The letter indicated is then typed by the bookkeeper and presented to the manager for his signature.

A typical series of letters issued according to one of these systems is the following, used for monthly statement accounts. The resale material in these makes a pleasant impression, while it does not interfere with the impression of promptness made upon the reader.

*(1. Introductory letter, requesting monthly settlement)*

Dear Sir:

In accordance with my new system I am sending you the first itemized monthly statement of your account. These statements will be gotten out to you regularly on or shortly after the first of every month. By filing them you will have a neat, complete, detailed record of your entire charge account with me.

I am sure that the goods which you have bought of me are good and that the prices are right. I can assure you that I can do fully as well and better for you in the future, as the great advantages which I am gaining through cooperation with other first-class merchants are constantly increasing.

I surely appreciate the business which you are giving me and wish to take this opportunity of thanking you for it.

Very truly yours,

*(2. First request for payment)*

Dear Sir:

A considerable part of the amount on the enclosed statement is past due. Evidently you overlooked this last month. I hope you will settle it before the next monthly statements are sent out.

I surely appreciate your trade and am always anxious to please you, not only by giving you the best possible service my store can offer, but also by extending credit accommodation to you whenever that makes buying more convenient for you. My prices, however, are all figured on a cash basis, so I must see that my book accounts never represent a large percentage of my investment in this business.

In case it is inconvenient for you to pay the entire amount soon, please pay something on account and inform me when I may expect the balance.

Very truly yours,

---

*(3. Second request for payment)*

Dear Sir:

Last month I sent you a letter in which I called your attention to the fact that some of the items on your account were past due. I now see that you have made no payment on this account in the last 30 days and am wondering what might be the cause of the delay. Please be sure to pay up before the next revision of my accounts (15th to 20th).

This is very important for me, as I must follow my established rules and must keep my accounts low.

But there is one thing which is still more important, and that is to please and satisfy you so that I will be sure of retaining your trade, which I value very highly.

If you have found anything which does not appear right, just, or fair to you, please be sure to tell me about it. It will give me an opportunity of explaining my methods and possibly of improving them.

Very truly yours,

---

*(4. Third request for payment)*

Dear Sir:

I wish again to call your attention to your account. You are allowing payment to run behind. You have already received two letters from me concerning this account, but you have not responded to either of them.

When I opened this charge account for you I thought I was making things easier and more convenient for you; and I was very glad to accommodate you. But I fully expected that you would not postpone payment for such a long time. As all my prices are made on a cash basis, it is important that accounts due me are paid promptly. I cannot afford to extend credit accommodation to customers who do not cooperate with me in their payments.

I shall expect an immediate settlement of your account.

Very truly yours,

---

*(5. Last request before going to lawyers for collection)*

Dear Sir:

I really cannot understand why you have not paid any attention to my letters asking for a settlement of your account.

It is now over four months ago that you bought the goods charged on your account. I think you will agree with me that I have been very lenient and considerate and that I am entitled to a payment without any more delay.

Unless you pay your account within the next 10 days I shall be forced to the conclusion that I must adopt more effective measures. Accordingly, if you do not pay before the 10 days are up I shall hand your account to my lawyers for immediate collection.

I dislike to adopt such strict and harsh methods or even to mention them, but I cannot grant you any more time.

Very truly yours,

---

*(500. Last request before transferring to D. A.)*

Dear Sir:

I am at a loss to understand why you have not responded to my letters asking you to make a payment on your account which is long past due. What does this mean?

The only explanation which I can find for your action is that it would be impossible for you to make a payment to me at the present time without causing yourself or those near and dear to you great suffering. Is that correct?

I surely do not want to cause you any great hardship, but your account must positively not appear in my Register next month. If it is not paid before the end of this month I will close it by transferring it to my list of "Poor and Doubtful Accounts."

I am giving you these extra four weeks because I know you would not want your name to go on that list if you can prevent it in any way. You should put forth every effort to pay your account before the time is up.

Very truly yours,



**Transfer to Doubtful Accounts.**—But what is the retailer to do when collection efforts fail, and the customer cannot pay?

Mr. Ruedebusch answers, "These people are my good friends and neighbors and I am sorry for them. We want their cash business. They are not going to leave town; they will still need clothes and shoes; they can get better goods and service from us than from anybody else—and they *know* it. But if they think they will be hounded for their bill they will never come near us. If we lose their goodwill too, they will make other enemies for us. I want them to hold their heads high when they come into my store, and to keep right on coming. That means, sometime, they will pay."

The result of his reasoning is that he transfers the account to losses, and tells his customer about it. He gives up the attempt to collect? Not at all. He continues selling this customer on credit? Not that either. Read the following letter and see how it solves the whole problem and *keeps the trade*.

(6. *Notice of transfer to D. A.*)

Dear Sir:

We are disappointed. We expected that you would find it possible to make payment to us on that old account before this time, and we are sorry, indeed, that our fine record of collections must be spoiled by charging this to "Losses on Accounts." Fortunately they have been very small so far, and we suppose that there was some sad reason for your failure to pay up.

We have today closed your account by transferring it to our list of "Doubtful Accounts." This does not mean that we have given up hopes of collecting it. It simply means that we did not want it to appear "open" in our charge accounts hereafter.

We want you and your family to visit our store very often to see all the fine new things and the constantly increasing advantages which we are always offering. In these visits you will never be bothered with this unpaid account. That is for our office people to attend to, and, as your account is now "closed," they will not send you any more "dunning letters" until your financial condition has improved.

It is our sincere wish that better times may come for you in the future, and we know that you will then be glad to remember and pay this old debt. It is always particularly pleasant when we receive a payment on doubtful accounts that have been charged to "Losses." We feel sure that you will cause us this pleasure some time; hence we will not worry about your account hereafter, but will try to serve you so well that we will always deserve and receive all, or a good share, of your trade in our lines.

Yours truly,

When the store management concludes that a customer's failure to respond is due to stubbornness rather than to real inability to pay, the account is turned over to a local attorney. But if he reports failure, a letter is issued which in the first three paragraphs shows the strength of the creditor's position, while the last two duplicate those of the preceding letter.

*(25. Notice of withdrawal from lawyers and transfer to D. A.)*

Dear Sir:

Our attorneys have informed us that you do not seem to be willing to pay the account which we transferred to them for collection. They advised us to bring suit against you at once, in order to secure this account, full interest thereon, and all expenses by a judgment, which can surely be turned into cash some time.

We do not like the idea of loading you up with heavy costs and a constantly increasing debt, and we fear that you may not be able to pay up at the present time without causing yourself and those near and dear to you great suffering.

After due consideration we have come to the following conclusion. We will withdraw this account from our lawyers, and will close it by transferring it to our list of "Doubtful Accounts." This does not mean that we have given up hopes of collecting it. It means simply that we did not want it to appear "open" among our accounts hereafter. (For last two paragraphs see preceding letter.)

**Method of a Small-Town Merchant.**—One of America's famous small-town merchants, a man who does a business that many a metropolis might envy, bases his collection methods on a twofold classification of his customers. To the reasonable man who will respond to a friendly request, he writes—after statements with suggestive "stickers" pasted on them have had no effect—

I have a heavy bill to meet in a couple of days with one of my wholesalers. Can you help me out?

This appeal to goodwill coming from a prosperous and successful merchant has in it no element of weakness, and results in the securing of a part payment.

But if the debtor is of the shifty or cross-grained type, the merchant appeals to his curiosity. He writes him,

Dear John, I want to see you about something. Could you come in tomorrow evening about closing time?

In nine cases out of ten, when the man comes in, he brings the payment with him, suspecting that this is the cause of the letter. But the merchant outguesses him by having something that he really does want to talk about, in no way related to the account. If, however, the delinquent does not voluntarily open the subject of the account, the merchant finds it easy to introduce the topic.

**Attitude of Customers Toward Statements.**—In many districts where long-time retail credit has been the rule, customers regard it as a mortal offense to approach the subject of their account. This unhealthy condition absolutely must be remedied, if the retailer is to survive. The issuing of regular statements will be only one item in the campaign of reform, but it is a necessary one.

A successful method when a customer shows that he is angry at receiving a statement at the end of the month, is to say to him, "Why, John, you're mistaken, I'm not dunning you. That's only our new method for helping you to keep track of your purchases. If we let it go for too long a time, it is hard for you to find out any mistakes we may have made." Putting the shoe on this foot and appealing to the customer's self-interest produces results in nearly every case; while, needless to say, the statement and the conversation have an indirect value in making payments more prompt.

**Retail Instalment Accounts.**—When a retail store decides to venture into the instalment field, it finds that special machinery must be set up for the collection of deferred payment accounts. In many stores, open book and instalment accounts are handled together. Others have found it desirable to segregate the instalment credits and handle them through a special unit or division of the credit and collection department.

A notable service to retailers entering or planning to enter the field of instalment selling has been rendered by the Policyholders Service Bureau of the Metropolitan Life Insurance

Company, which has made a careful study of retail instalment business and issued a valuable report under the title, "Methods of Collecting Retail Instalment Accounts."

**Gimbel System.**—One of the stores whose instalment methods are described in detail in the report is that of Gimbel Brothers in New York City. This concern handles all deferred payment collections through its general credit and collection department. Prospective purchasers of goods sold on instalment terms are introduced by the salesman to a representative of the credit department, who interviews the customer and obtains from him information required for the instalment credit file. This includes the purchaser's name, address, telephone number, occupation, name and address of employer, property owned, banking connections, and names of concerns with which the customer has charge accounts.

When the interview is over, the customer goes to the cashier's office and makes his down payment, but until the credit is given final approval, Gimbel Brothers reserve the right to refund the initial deposit and reject the application. The credit investigation, which is begun at once and usually takes about two days, is expedited by putting several employees simultaneously on the job of checking up the credit references. If the reports on these are satisfactory, the credit is given final approval and the account is handled in accordance with the regular instalment collection procedure.

On all merchandise bought on the instalment basis the Gimbel store adds a carrying charge, but if the account is cleared up within 60 days after purchase, an allowance is made. The minimum sale allowed is \$25 and the down payment is 10 per cent. The minimum down payment has been set at \$20 and the minimum monthly payment at \$5. The maximum period for completing payments is eighteen months.

On purchases of pianos, vacuum cleaners, and sewing machines, special arrangements with the manufacturers enable the store to offer special terms to customers. In arranging the dates of the periodic payments, the store gives consideration to the customer's pay day and rent day.

**Collection Procedure.**—Among the retail stores given a high rating for instalment collection methods in the Policyholders Service Bureau report is the Seattle concern of Grunbaum Brothers, Inc. In this store, says the report, the follow-up of deferred payment accounts is handled "with clock-like precision." When the usual preliminary routine for credit authorization is completed, an addressograph plate is prepared, from which are printed four copies of the contract, the ledger sheet and a 3 x 5 reference card used for indexing the accounts by street address. The addressograph plates, equipped with red and white signal tabs indicating accounts in arrears and good accounts respectively, are filed in a cabinet with individual drawers for each due date.

On the day preceding the due date, all tabs are placed in the red position. If the customer calls to make a payment on the date promised, the ledger account is consulted and the cashier issues a receipt in triplicate, noting thereon the due date. One copy of the receipt is issued to the customer, one remains in the book, and the third is placed on a spindle which is cleared hourly by a clerk. The clerk refers to the plate and removes from sight the red signal, indicating that the payment has been made. Every customer's account on which the current instalment has not been paid in full is then indicated by a red flag remaining up in the addressograph file. Five days after the payment becomes due, the plates are placed in the addressograph machine, which separates delinquent accounts (designated by red signal) for which statements are printed. These statements, together with the ledger sheets, are then turned over to the collection manager and his assistants, who are thus required to review only the accounts on which payments are in arrears. To their judgment is left the final disposition of the statements.

If it is decided to mail out the statement, the figures showing the balance unpaid and the total amount in arrears are written in red ink and a notation of the action taken is made on the reverse side of the ledger sheet. If it appears necessary to send a form letter or to telephone the debtor, the number of the particular form used or the symbol "Ph." is written in

the lower left-hand corner of the sheet. If the account is turned over to an outside collector, a card is made out for the collector and a note to this effect is made on the customer ledger sheet.

Regardless of the disposition of the account, the red flag in the drawer remains in view, showing that the account is in arrears. After a period determined in accordance with a pre-arranged schedule, another statement is sent. The schedule calls for a checking of accounts at least four times every thirty days. The time for printing the statement is left until receipts from the morning mail have been entered, and hourly throughout the day the tabs are kept up to the minute. This eliminates the possibility of dunning a customer who has already paid his instalment.

If an account is paid, for example, at 2 P.M. on the day that a statement is being mailed, the assistant would know that this particular tray was being worked on that day. The collection manager would be notified immediately and the offending statement removed from the day's mail. This is an important feature of the Grunbaum plan, designed to insure speed and accuracy and to safeguard customer goodwill.

When the account is settled in full, the plate is removed to the inactive file, which is alphabetically arranged. A form letter expressing appreciation for past patronage and inviting an early reopening of the account is then sent to the customer. This is followed up by a series of similar letters, supplemented by sales literature. If the customer reopens the account, the plate is readily available to be put back in the active file.

"Skips" and customers whose whereabouts are unknown, indicated by the symbol "L," are reviewed periodically. Since these are segregated from the good accounts, a list may be compiled occasionally and submitted to the post office for correction. Bad debts are marked "B.D." and segregated in a separate file.

The efficiency of the Grunbaum method is indicated by the fact that the concern's volume of business has tripled in four years, with only a 10 per cent increase in the office staff. Collections have been maintained on a basis where an audit dis-

closed only one per cent of accounts receivable delinquent over ninety days. Bad debts were less than one-half of one per cent, and the list of "skips" averaged less than 30 names.

**Chain Store Collections.**—Centralized control is the keynote of successful chain store collections. Among the concerns which have worked out effective centralized systems are the Hartman Corporation of Chicago, operating a chain of thirty furniture stores in Wisconsin, Illinois, and Indiana, and Fulop Brothers, Inc., maintaining a chain of credit clothing and furnishing stores on the Pacific Coast. Fulop Brothers operate from headquarters at Portland, Oregon, and have established there a general credit office, with a master index file of all accounts in the chain.

Through this central file is cleared every individual application for credit accommodation. If an applicant at one store has an unpaid account pending in any other store, the fact is readily ascertained and payment is immediately demanded.

As a means of centralizing collection control, each local credit manager is required to submit an individual report to the home office each month on every account that is more than thirty days overdue. This must be supplemented by additional reports every thirty days, so that the general credit manager may know just what action is being taken in each specific case. These reports are summarized on a monthly recapitulation sheet maintained at headquarters for each store in the chain.

**Letters for Small Independent Stores.**—While all that has been said about retail collection methods applies to small concerns as well as to large city establishments, it is desirable to offer at this point some concrete suggestions for the neighborhood or "corner store" merchant. The following are letters which may be used to aid collections in a dozen lines of retail business.

(*Groceries*)

Dear Mr. Smith:

I am sure that all I need to do in order to insure an improvement in the condition of your account for groceries and table supplies I have delivered to your family is to remind you that the balance on ... was \$ .....

I mustn't let the wholesaler down, you know, and I depend on you to help me to keep my credit good with him.

Won't you mail a check today, or come in and pay the amount in cash, if that is more convenient?

I shall be glad to see you, and show you some new packed fruits and vegetables we have just received from California.

Very truly yours,

---

*(Dry goods)*

Dear Mr. Jones:

I was glad to charge to your account the dress materials I delivered to Mrs. Jones in May, as I knew that they were to be used for your daughter's high school graduation in June. But my calendar says that it is now August, and the bill still remains unpaid.

Can't you come in and pay at least part of the bill this coming Saturday? If it is impossible for you to meet all of it on that day, I am sure that we can agree on some special arrangement that will be satisfactory to both of us.

Very truly yours,

---

*(Clothing)*

Dear Mr. Brown:

At the lodge the other night I noticed how well you looked in that A. and B. suit I sold you several months ago. Surely you won't mind my suggesting that I would appreciate at least a partial payment on the suit before depreciation on it has gone too far.

If you can come in within the next few days and sweeten up the account a bit I'll be glad to show you some new topcoats we have received, for resale at the lowest price we have been able to make for years. Real quality, too!

I'll be looking for you.

Very truly yours,

---

*(Drugs)*

Dear Mr. Green:

As you have always met your drug bills promptly, I feel sure that there is some special reason why you have allowed your balance on my books to mount up to a total of \$21.30.

In settling with my suppliers, I have to meet definite terms of payment. Otherwise my stock could not be kept up the way it is, ready for any call my friends and neighbors may make in an emergency.

Can you send me a check when you receive this letter, or come in and let me treat you to an orangeade?

Very truly yours,



(*Hardware*)

Dear Mr. Black:

That new mower I got for you on a special order back in May is keeping your lawn in fine condition. I have paid the manufacturer for it, but according to my books I have not been reimbursed by you, although it is now midsummer.

You are proud of your lawn, and I don't blame you. I wish mine looked as well. But I am sure that you want to be proud also of your credit standing with the local merchants, and it will help in that direction if you will send me a check for the lawn mower, or at least come in and make a partial payment.

Going hunting this fall? I have a fine new line of shells and cartridges, and if your old twelve-gauge gun is not working properly I can give you a new hammerless at a price that will surprise you.

Very truly yours,

---

(*Printing*)

Dear Mr. Johnson:

Those letterheads, envelopes, and bill-forms I printed for you are, I am sure, helping you to carry on your business satisfactorily. Mine would look a little better if you would take care of that bill for \$24.75 on which I have sent you several statements without result.

I sincerely hope that the bill-forms I delivered to you are helping you to get in the money from your customers. Enclosed is one of mine. Won't you please return it with a check, so that I may have the satisfaction of making a credit entry on page 181 of my ledger?

That's the Johnson page, you know.

Very truly yours,

---

(*Laundry*)

Dear Mr. Allen:

When I bought that new mangle last spring I had two objects in view—to increase my business and to give better service to my customers.

Both have been realized, but more business will not help me unless I can get my patrons to pay promptly for my service.

Your bill has been running for nearly four months without a payment. Every month I have had to make a payment on the mangle. Do you see the point?

Mrs. Allen tells me that the service is completely satisfactory. Can you cooperate by sending me a check? I shall appreciate it very much, and so will the man who sold me the equipment.

Very truly yours,

(*Restaurant*)

Dear Mr. Bell:

In establishing a system enabling my patrons to sign checks, the same as in a big city hotel or restaurant, I thought I was doing something to help make Centerville a little more metropolitan.

Most of my customers seem to appreciate this convenience, and mail me a check soon after the receipt of the monthly bill. Your account, however, is one of a few that have not shown up so well.

Don't you want to move over to the side of the majority? Just pin a check to the enclosed statement and mail it. I'll have some special Cape Cods opened for you the next time you come in.

Very truly yours,

---

(*Florist*)

Dear Mr. Clark:

During the past few months I have been glad to fill orders for you for flowers for special occasions, some of which were sad and some joyous.

Frankly, I'm more sad than joyous as I look at your account and find that although the flowers have served their purpose you have made no response to my bills and statements. I want to keep on providing flowers and plants for this community, and if my customers do their part I can carry on. Your part just now is to send me a check for \$ . . . or come in and pay the bill in cash.

One of my cornflowers would look fine in the lapel of your coat.

Very truly yours,

---

(*Footwear*)

Dear Mr. Dean:

You have often heard the expression, "Put yourself in the other man's shoes." I'm afraid that is just what you have done by neglecting to take care of your bill with me, which now amounts to \$ . . . .

I am sure you don't walk around willingly in another man's shoes. If you will send a check for \$ . . . at once, or stop in my store and pay the bill, you will do me a service and at the same time put yourself in a better position, as you'll be wearing out your own shoe leather instead of mine.

Very truly yours,

(*Stationer*)

Dear Mr. Evans:

It would, I imagine, be inconvenient for you to pay cash every time you send one of your clerks for supplies, or every time one of my boys delivers a newspaper at your residence, but I am afraid that you are going to force me into establishing a cash policy in your case unless you take better care of your monthly bills.

The balance, now amounting to \$ . . . , covers a period of several months. May I ask you to send a check this week, or pay the amount at my store, so that I may feel justified in continuing the service on a credit basis?

Very truly yours,

---

(*Beauty parlor*)

Dear Mrs. Fisher:

As you are a newcomer to Centerville, you may not have understood that most of my customers pay in cash. The special arrangement of a charge account was made at your request and for your convenience.

As I value your patronage, I am glad to continue the arrangement in your case, but I expect payment soon after the sending of the bill on or about the first of each month.

Your balance now stands at \$ . . . . May I ask you to send a check for this amount before the end of the week? Or, if Mr. Fisher prefers to come in and pay the amount in cash, that will be entirely satisfactory to me.

Very truly yours,

## CHAPTER 31

### DEPARTMENT STORE COLLECTIONS

**The Department Store's Collection Problem.**—The large store, especially the department store, has collection problems of its own, due to the fact that the proprietor or manager cannot interview new customers and applicants for credit in person. The applicant for credit is usually brought to the credit desk by a clerk and introduced either to an assistant or to the credit man. The interview which follows is all too likely to be extremely formal, limited to the filling out of a blank and entirely devoid of any attempt to welcome the customer, to talk about the service of the store, or to "sell credit." Often, however, the opportunity is skilfully utilized and the customer is made to feel that despite its size, the store has a personal interest in every one of its patrons. It is always advisable that the actual granting of credit by a large store be made by letter, as it gives an opportunity for some verification of the information received, while the letter itself can be so cordial and explicit as to make a fresh impression on the recipient. The psychologist would point out that most of us are "eye-minded" rather than "ear-minded," and that the explanation of the terms of the house is impressed on the ear through the interview and on the eye by the letter.

**Soliciting Charge Accounts.**—In their eagerness to secure and hold new customers some large stores are in the habit of soliciting charge accounts. The following letter, for example, was issued by a well-known department store to a selected list of residents in the suburbs of New York City, saying that a charge account had been opened in their name. In making up this list great care was exercised to place on it only those whose credit was known to be first class through their dealings with other stores in the city.

*(Letter announcing charge account)*

Dear Madam:

For your convenience we have opened a charge account on our books under your name.

There is no further formality to consider, and your orders will be filled promptly, without delay of any sort.

If you have "shopped" carefully enough to pass judgment on the prices of such items as those on the enclosed leaflet, you will quickly verify our **EXTREMELY CONSERVATIVE** claim that "you never pay more at Barton's." (We prefer to say it that way usually, but if you have compared prices in the leading New York stores you will know how much more it really means.)

We shall welcome our first "charge" order from you—and possibly the enclosure may suggest to you the very thing. If it does, you might put our store service to an immediate test by telephoning and ordering what you wish—or a postal card or letter will be just as effective. We deliver to your home free.

Promptness, accuracy, and courtesy are part of our promise—and complete satisfaction with your purchases is the rest of it.

Yours truly,

**Letter When a New Account Is Opened.**—The following letter, for example, is used with considerable success by a prominent department store.

Dear Madam:

We take pleasure in granting your application for a charge account. We shall render bills on the first of the month succeeding purchase, which we shall expect paid by the fifteenth of that month.

This store especially welcomes out-of-town accounts and places at your disposal the entire resources of its organization to make your shopping convenient, whether you visit us in person or send your orders by mail. Have you been told about our special buyers who become acquainted with your personal wishes and do your shopping for you when you cannot come into town? The enclosed folder will introduce them to you.

All your purchases will be satisfactory, if our care and goodwill can make them so.

Cordially yours,

**Handling the Customer in Arrears.**—A customer with an account in arrears is likely to carry her trade elsewhere, fearing that if she puts in an appearance at the creditor's store, she

will be taken personally to task. In order to bring her into the store, and to imply that her credit is still good, the manager of a progressive department store on the Pacific Coast uses the two following letters.

*(The first letter to customer in arrears)*

CREDIT DEPARTMENT

Dear Madam:

"What can the matter be?" A store of Smith's progressiveness and prestige is not overlooked lightly. There must be some very interesting reason why you have not been using your charge account here lately. Won't you tell us what it is?

No matter what the trouble is, we want to remedy it, and we believe we can.

Have you visited the store recently? If not, a delightful day awaits you. New Spring goods radiate freshness from every department, a new wicker furniture department has been opened on the third floor, and the colorful Spring creations in our millinery department are drawing crowds every day. In fact the whole building, from basement store to roof garden, is full of interest and inspiration.

Your charge account is still open, and this is a special invitation to make use of it at your earliest opportunity.

At your service,

---

*(The second letter to customer in arrears)*

CREDIT DEPARTMENT

Dear Madam:

You have not been using your charge account lately and we are wondering why. We are deeply concerned to know if it is the store's fault. If so, we want to correct it at once. We have greatly appreciated your patronage and any failure in courteous attention, good service, or hospitality on our part would be a matter of deep regret to us.

We urge you to tell us if we have failed in any instance to give you satisfaction.

The store has now put on its summer dress and is bright and fresh with new apparel for home wear or the outing trip.

We have never had more carefully selected or more abundant stocks, nor any that more nearly filled our desire to combine right style and right quality with right price.

We are sure you will like these summer things and hope that you will soon find occasion to use your charge account again.

Yours truly,

Needless to say, when the customer comes around, she is tactfully approached and an arrangement is made for payment of her arrears.

**Collection Procedure of a Department Store.**—When an account is opened in a certain large department store of New York City it is given a rating which guides the clerk in passing on an individual purchase, the bookkeeper in posting it, the collector in handling it. At a certain time in each month, the bookkeepers make out statements on all accounts which are unpaid up to the first of the month. These are assorted according to their ratings and the statements issued accordingly.

The ratings, which are in cipher, indicate the amount of credit accommodation allowed. For instance, a professional man on a salary of a certain amount might be allowed fifty dollars a month. If a customer's purchases exceed his rating, the bookkeeper notes this on his daily report sheet sent to the credit office. The store frequently discovers just grounds for changing the credit rating, and does so. The statement as issued contains the sentence: "Terms: Goods are sold at cash rates and payment required early part of following month." A stub attached to the statement and filled out at the same time is retained by the store. This shows, in addition to the record of amount owing for merchandise delivered, the customer's habits of payment, the month, the date paid, the ledger, the folio, the rating, and its number as a new account. These stubs are assorted according to the ledger and, if the bill is not paid promptly, the name and address are filled in, so that it will serve as a collection memorandum.

According to the proportion between the customer's rating and the size of purchases, the stub may be advanced ten days in the file to wait for the customer's remittance or the adjustment of the account, or some other step in the procedure may be taken at once. Whenever a collection letter is written the carbon copy goes to the bookkeeper during the last hour of the day to make sure that payment has not come in, and if there is any difference as to the amount due, or any complaint (the adjustment bureau always makes notation in ledger at

time of receiving complaint) the bookkeeper notes this on the face of the carbon copy of the letters to the customer. The various statements or letters sent, or visits of collectors, are noted together with their date on the ledger. No action is taken without reference to this. The specially slow accounts will be sent down to the credit office by the collection office and stronger letters are written, or a special collector sent out, until finally the statement is made that the account is in shape to be turned over to the legal office.

**Overselling Means Hard Collections.**—Whenever special effort is made to solicit charge accounts, credit risks must be looked up with unusual care and the collection man must watch very keenly the accounts secured in this fashion. The temptation to overbuy is almost irresistible when one carries accounts at a large number of stores. Also, when an account is opened without a credit interview, the store has lost its opportunity to “sell credit,” and indirectly to impress the customer’s obligation on her mind. It is a method attended with unusual credit risk because it makes impossible some of the ordinary credit precautions. Consequently, if adopted, it throws additional burdens on the collection man and makes it more advisable that in the early stages of collection he sell credit by means of printed remarks on vouchers and statements, special stickers pasted on them, etc. He may also suggest some of the points bearing on the value of credits in any early letters he may write.

**A Department Store Letter Series.**—The modern tendency to avoid stereotyped expression in collection correspondence is well illustrated in the following series, circulated by the Policyholders Service Bureau of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company:

*(Card, without salutation or signature)*

A matter of routine... nothing more than the hope that you will now be glad to send us your check for \$....., the amount of your Central Department Store bill for the month of . . . . .



*(First letter)*

Dear Mrs. Smith:

We know perfectly well how quickly the months slip by and how sometimes, unavoidably, your usual practice of paying monthly may be omitted, and we are quite sure that you will now wish to send us check for your bill for . . . . .

The amount is \$.....

Very truly yours,

---

*(Second letter)*

Dear Mrs. Smith:

Why not have a real understanding about your Central Department Store bill?

The fact that your name is on our charge account list is in itself a proof of our full confidence. The further fact that there has been a little delay, unusual for you, leads us to believe that there must be some mighty good reason.

Now we have not the slightest disposition to press. Perhaps we can be of help to you. If for any reason whatever you still wish to postpone this matter, tell us about it, and we shall gladly do anything we can for you.

Very truly yours,

---

*(Third letter)*

Dear Mrs. Smith:

Suppose we make it a personal matter . . . your Central Department Store bill.

There are always two sides to any question. To us, however, your side is the important side, and we are eager to do anything within our power to meet your convenience rather than our own. Because of our fullest confidence in you we opened your account gladly. There was the usual understanding that bills should be paid monthly. We are not disturbed when an occasional month slips by. When we hear nothing for several months we like to feel that there is some very good reason, and we want to know it because we want to help.

Now, won't you drop in, or telephone in (telephone number) for the friendliest, frankest kind of a chat? Then we shall all be happy. Unless, of course, it is now convenient for you to send a check for the amount of your bill, \$ .....

Very truly yours,

*(Fourth letter)*

Dear Mrs. Smith:

Is it quite fair?

There's your Central Department Store bill for \$ , dating back now months. Here we are, have been all along, ready to meet you far more than half way, and we have told you so several times. Not a word from you.

The way out is so easy. Tell us about it, just tell us, and see how prompt we are, how whole-hearted in our endeavor to make it pleasant for you, convenient for you to do the thing we know you really want to do—get this bill out of the way.

Very truly yours,

---

*(Fifth letter)*

Dear Mrs. Smith:

It hurts, not so much from the dollar side as from the justice side of it. We can conjure up in our minds any number of legitimate reasons why an over-long delay in the payment of your bill might be unavoidable.

What we cannot reconcile, however, is the complete silence, especially when a mere word of good faith would have delighted us to leave it all to you.

How much farther do you think we ought to go along the road to the day when we shall receive your check for \$ , which is the amount of your bill now . . . . . months overdue?

Very truly yours,

---

*(Sixth letter)*

Dear Mrs. Smith:

There's inevitably a breaking point!

It's the way with our patience sometimes, and one of those sometimes is just around the corner. Don't, for your own sake, ignore your Central Department Store bill any longer.

Never mind our side of it. Consider your side, the credit reputation involved, the . . . . . , well, just stop to think that you owe us \$. . . . . , have owed it for . . . . . long months.

Very truly yours,

*(Seventh letter)*

Dear Mrs. Smith:

Do we, or do we not?

In other words, shall we adjust your Central Department Store bill amicably, or shall it be the other thing?

There are two choices—your check for the amount of your long overdue bill, \$ . . . . . , or a plan which will assure us that this bill is to be paid.

We prefer the check.

Very truly yours,

---

*(Eighth letter)*

Dear Mrs. Smith:

This note requires an answer by return mail.

Do you intend to pay your Central Department Store bill which is now . . . . months overdue?

The amount is \$ . . . . .

Remember, please, by RETURN MAIL.

Very truly yours,

---

*(Ninth and final letter)*

Dear Mrs. Smith:

Unless we receive your check on or before . . . . . our attorneys will receive instructions to summon you to court.

The amount of the claim is \$. . . . .

Very truly yours,

**McCreery Methods.**—The collection system used by James McCreery & Company of New York City shows exceptional originality and resourcefulness. Just before the Christmas holidays, for example, each delinquent is sent a folder, printed in colors, with nothing on the outside cover but a holly wreath and the name of the concern. On the inside page is a statement of the account, tabulated by months, and the following printed in old English: "We have been happy to share your

patronage. A balanced account will assist us to serve you more promptly during your holiday shopping."

From the McCreery letter series, the three following are selected:

*(Used in the early stages of delinquency)*

Dear Mrs. Smith:

Your account has again been brought to my attention because the amount remaining open on it has been allowed to stand a longer period than our terms of sale permit.

It is not our desire to annoy you with numerous requests for payment, and it is for this reason I am making a direct personal appeal. Surely you can appreciate the position we are placed in by your failure to respond.

When remitting, won't you please state frankly the reason for the delay?

This will bring about a closer understanding and we are confident will prove to our mutual advantage.

Please address your reply for my personal attention.

Very truly yours,

ASST. CREDIT MANAGER

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*(Assuming a more drastic tone)*

Dear Mrs. Smith:

Our records show that we have sent you a number of communications regarding your account, which still remains unpaid.

When an account becomes overdue, the credit standing of the delinquent is not affected entirely by the actual amount involved but to an equal degree by the effort we feel that our patron is putting forth to meet the obligation.

You will admit that we have been very fair in writing you a number of times but we feel that further correspondence would be of no avail.

We have hesitated to take any action that might embarrass you and we urge a settlement in full on or before the ..... of .....

Very truly yours,

COLLECTION MANAGER

Dear Mrs. Brown:

We were pleased to charge and deliver your recent selection.

Some time ago we urged prompt settlement of your bills. Your co-operation in this respect permits us to share with you the benefits derived from prompt turnover of money.

We are anxious to make your charge account with us a real convenience; and you help us to render prompt service in passing on your current credit requirements when your bills are met according to our terms.

You are assured we appreciate the opportunity you have again given us to serve you.

Very truly yours,

**Letters after Closing of Instalment Account.**—In the description of the Grunbaum system in Chapter 30, reference was made to a letter expressing appreciation for past patronage and inviting an early reopening of the account. Here are two letters used by Gimbel Brothers, New York City, the first designed to lead to purchases of additional articles on the instalment plan, and the second to the opening of a regular charge account:

Dear Sir:

The splendid manner in which payments were made on your account is appreciated. The establishment of a good credit record is a valuable personal asset and we list you as one of our preferred customers.

Right now there are many unusual thrift opportunities available at GIMBELS and we urge you to do all of your shopping in our increasingly popular store. To facilitate prompt service in re-opening your account, we suggest you bring this letter with you.

The many advantages our deferred payment plans afford are explained in detail in the enclosed booklet. We are looking forward to further opportunities to be of service.

Very truly yours,

Dear Sir:

In appreciation of the splendid manner in which you took care of your Deferred Payment account, we have opened a regular Charge Account in your name.

A charge identification coin and a booklet explaining the facilities now at your disposal are enclosed.

Your charge account may be used for purchasing throughout our store. An itemized bill showing all your purchases will be rendered on the first of each month and will be payable in full by the tenth.

Be sure to try this convenient way of shopping and find out for yourself how pleasant it is to buy at Gimbels and merely say "Charge It."

Very truly yours,

GIMBEL BROTHERS

## CHAPTER 32

### COLLECTION OF PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTS

**The Collector's Function.**—The subject of professional accounts interests not only doctors and lawyers but also collectors, since no inconsiderable share of the collector's work lies in following up accounts which for various reasons the professional man does not care to press himself. The interests of the professional man, moreover, extend to the work of the collector as well, for if the latter does his work crudely he may alienate clients who should be retained; while if he does his work without sufficient vigor the professional man will lose the money due him.

**A Serious Matter to the Doctor.**—Since the collection of medical accounts presents a problem of unusual interest and difficulty it will be discussed first in this chapter, leaving the discussion of legal accounts until later.

The question of getting the money which is due him for services rendered is a very serious matter for the doctor. Harsh and exacting methods of collection will drive away the patronage which he has laboriously built up. His success is entirely dependent upon the long-continued patronage of families and individuals, who would not think of calling in any one save him. If after a single call on a patient he should have a disagreement which resulted in his making no further visits, the doctor's practice would be ruined as soon as it was begun.

On the other hand, his inability to obtain the money due him is often a prime cause of his failure. The failure may be complete, obliging him to give up his practice and to start over again in another location; or it may be only partial, preventing his entire success. It may be a failure to get needed equipment, certain appliances which will enable him to keep

up with his profession, and to give his patients the modern service which is their due. He may be unable to make needed alterations or improvements in his office equipment and furniture, with the result that he fails to give his patients the added comfort and conveniences which would increase the pleasure they derive from his services. Perhaps he needs a new car to enable him to make his visits with speed and with the certainty of not being detained by breakdowns. Quite possibly he ought to have a longer vacation so that he can come back to his work with renewed vigor, after a rest; or he may wish to put in some weeks or months of possible study, that will equip him for greater usefulness in the future. In all of these matters his patrons, as well as the physician himself, have a strong indirect interest. The various additions which could be made to his efficiency if he were able to collect the money due him would render him of greater value to his patients and would increase his influence for good over them and in the community.

Moreover the doctor should consider the needs of his family. He may have children requiring an education, who have a right besides to the proper standing in the community which a satisfactory income can bring. Notwithstanding, it is a notorious fact that the majority of doctors have accounts on their books which from an ordinary business point of view can be collected, but which are not collected.

**The Difficulty of the Doctor's Case.**—There are many factors peculiar to the doctor's collection situation. First, he is a professional man and not a business man, and is hedged about with a peculiar etiquette which prevents him from employing precisely the collection methods of the business man. Sometimes he interprets it as debarring him from employing any real collection methods whatever. Second, his relation with his customers is a personal one; consequently he feels delicate about approaching them directly for payment. Third, he is selling service, not a tangible commodity, but one which different people may interpret variously. Three or four months after they have been cured, their estimate of the service they have received is likely to be pretty low. Fourth, it is



impossible for the doctor to make credits; he cannot choose for his customers only those who are good credit risks, but is obliged professionally to render his services to every one who is in need of them. While this increases the difficulty of making collections it may be said in passing that the position is not without its strength as well as weakness. Fifth, the doctor is himself not without blame; he is typically unbusinesslike. Oftentimes his records are poor, his system is irregular to the last degree, and his procedure is limited to issuing statements with an occasional "please remit" stamped across the bottom. Sixth, he deals with "unbusinesslike people." When this statement is analyzed it will be found to mean merely that he deals with people who in the first place have not been educated to an understanding of the credit obligation, and in the second place have no sense of self-interest in paying but only a sense of obligation. The retail purchaser pays in order to escape the annoyance of being dunned, and in order not to have his credit with the merchant cut off. The merchant in turn pays in order to be able to secure from his creditors more goods with which to continue in business. But the physician's patient does not realize that in precisely the same way he must pay the physician in order to obtain his services again in time of need. Nevertheless this is the case. Seventh and last, the doctor is fighting an adverse tradition. People are accustomed to postpone payment with the half-apologetic defense, "Well, a man must live, you know," or "Perhaps I can spare you \$10." They treat him oftentimes as if he were asking for charity instead of for money which rightfully belongs to him. The butcher, the baker, the candlestickmaker all get their money before the doctor. Such a tradition endangers the entire usefulness of the medical profession by casting it into disrepute and lowering its dignity. The physician who combats it is serving his brother physicians, and his community as well.

Another factor which should be estimated in this connection, though not peculiar to medical accounts, is that the bill is sometimes for a lump sum of considerable size which the recipient is unable to settle at once in full.

**The Strength of the Doctor's Case.**—The standards of the medical profession are an excellent reason why the doctor's methods of collection should not sink *below* the standards of business, either by a slipshod irregularity or by an unintelligent harshness. The first is all too often the case when the doctor handles his own collections; the second may be the case if the collector the doctor employs has not received special instruction. The delicacy of his personal relation with his patient makes some difficulties, it is true, but it gives added weight to even the most guarded suggestion from him, and is perfectly capable of being utilized with courtesy and tact as a powerful means of securing payment. As to the intangible nature of the service which he is selling, a skilful suggestion by way of resale can bring these services vividly before the memory of even the most stubborn delinquent, so as to make him realize the worth of the value he has received and to make him willing to pay.

While the doctor cannot make credits, he can adapt his collection methods to his different classes of customers in such a way that they "classify themselves." The reasonable people respond to reasonable methods, and those who have finally shown themselves unreasonable are turned over to the outside collector.

Has the typically unbusinesslike character of the relations between the doctor and his customers any element of strength? Yes—for when businesslike methods are once adopted, the contrast with the usual methods attracts the debtor's attention and interest and arouses his respect. This has been proved in numberless cases, not only by physicians who have reformed their methods but by retailers and wholesalers also. The adverse tradition can be overcome by meeting it squarely with a campaign of education, preferably through the resolute and united efforts of all the physicians in the locality. The difficulty of the lump sum is easily overcome by making a definite arrangement, when necessary, for instalment payment.

The doctor's case has a legal strength also in that no jury would refuse to accept his own statement of the worth of the services for which he is asking payment. This is offset,

however, by the fact that no doctor would care to sue except in an aggravated case, as the ill will which it would bring him would be far more costly than the loss of money involved.

**The Need of Resale.**—Resale provides the doctor with logical and practical material for collection letters. It saves him entirely from an unreasoning harshness. It educates the community to realize the worth of such professional services and so builds solidly for the future. It makes goodwill and increases respect.

**Adopting Business Methods.**—The doctor may handle his collections himself either by letter or by personal call; he may employ his reception-room girl under the title of secretary to handle most of them; or he may at times use a collector. The suggestions for procedure which follow in a later section assume the careful preparation of letters by the doctor, to be typed and signed by his secretary. One or more letters may be personally signed, and in later stages a collector, to whom careful instruction has been given, may be employed.

**The Force of Habit.**—Throughout his collection procedure the physician should take a position of strength and not of weakness. He should use appeals which would imply the customer's own advantage in prompt payment, and appeals to such positive emotions as goodwill, fair play, and the sense of honor, rather than appeals to the sense of pity.

**Good Records.**—The foundation of collection system for a physician, as well as for a business man, is good records. Notes of office calls can be taken down by the assistant, while notes of home calls made by the doctor can be taken down by him in a memorandum book and turned over to be copied by his assistant at the end of the day. Every physician knows how records of this sort should be kept, but frequently in the rush of professional duties these items are overlooked because their importance is not realized.

**Promptness and Regularity.**—It is only fair to the patient to issue statements promptly and regularly. Any business

man and any householder knows that it is a practical service to be reminded at the end of each month just what are one's outstanding obligations. It is a fundamental principle of collections that no one objects to being reminded promptly and regularly of the money one owes, provided this is done with courtesy. Bills should be rendered at the end of each month; to wait for three months or a longer period allows the patient to forget all about the obligation incurred, and moreover allows the benefit of the service to fade from his mind. When he is well again—or when his troubles have returned—the mental image of benefits received is less vivid, and it is harder for him to pay. There is nothing of pressure or urgency implied in the sending of regular statements; if the doctor desires he can print at the head of the sheet, "Memorandum of Services Rendered."

**First Statement.**—While most physicians send the initial statement on the first of the month following that in which the services were rendered, some find it advantageous to mail it about ten days after the final call. In either case it is well to have the secretary send, with the statement, a brief letter.

Dear Mr. Brown:

As Dr. Johnson is very busy with his practice, he has asked me to send you the enclosed statement, covering services rendered by him to Mrs. Brown and Caroline during July.

May I ask you to draw a check for \$. . . . to the order of Charles H. Johnson and mail it to me in the enclosed stamped envelope?

Appreciating your usual prompt reply, I am

Sincerely yours,

MILDRED HARRISON  
Secretary

This letter serves as a courteous suggestion for immediate action. The recipient sends in his check at once, without being aware that he has received a "collection letter." It is a wonderfully successful method for securing prompt payment from those who are able to pay, but are likely to postpone the settlement of "doctor's bills" until every other demand

of necessity or extravagance has been satisfied. The businesslike directions of this note suggest businesslike payment.

**Second Statement.**—The second statement to a “good credit risk” will have nothing stamped or printed on it, but if sent to a person whom for any reason the doctor thinks it necessary to follow up fairly closely, it may be marked with a rubber stamp, with a printed sticker, or with the words in ink, “Your check in payment of this statement will be appreciated”; or, “is respectfully requested.”

**Third Statement.**—The third statement to a good risk, now that the account is sixty days overdue, may well contain a message as indicated in the preceding section. Action taken at this point will, of course, depend on the nature of the physician's practice. In a large city, he is likely to follow up his accounts promptly. His expenses are heavy, and his customers are able to pay. He has no right to be oversensitive about following a regular procedure, provided he does it courteously. If the customer cannot pay, he will be given a chance to say so.

**The Time for Resale.**—Unless the doctor has come to an arrangement with his patient by this time, he ought to realize that the crisis of the account has probably been reached, and that it is time for resale methods. A highly successful yet courteous method is to attach to his third statement a printed sticker reading, “The physician's moderate charge is made for the most valuable service you can receive. Will you not send your check in payment? It will be appreciated.” This may also be imprinted with a rubber stamp. It should not be written in ink, as it is a general, impersonal statement of educational character, and will have better effect if printed than if given the “personal touch” of handwriting.

Another statement possible at this time is “This is a third request for payment. Will you not send your check promptly?” Or the secretary may write with a pen, “Will you not let me have check in settlement of this account?” and sign the doctor's initials. The question is at once more pointed and more courteous than any other form of sentence.

**Fourth Request.**—If the account becomes ninety days overdue, it has reached a critical stage and another letter is called for, designed to bring some kind of reply if not a remittance. For this purpose a form similar to the following may be used:

Dear Mr. Brown:

As you have made no response to three monthly statements, Dr. Johnson infers that you have hesitated to reply because it is not convenient for you to pay the entire amount of \$ . . . at once.

If this is the case, could you not arrange to come in and see Dr. Johnson, or telephone him between 10 and 12 some morning this week?

He will, I am sure, be glad to arrange whatever special terms you require in order to meet the obligation.

Sincerely yours,

MILDRED HARRISON  
Secretary

**Fifth Request.**—If the secretary's second letter produces no action within three or four days, the doctor himself may either telephone the client or write him the following letter:

My dear Mr. Brown:

Miss Harrison tells me that she has sent you two letters and several statements concerning your account, but that you have made no reply.

I certainly do not want to allow any misunderstanding to come between us. Couldn't you call me up or come in to see me, and tell me frankly just what the trouble is? I am sure that we can make an arrangement that will be convenient for you and fair to me.

Cordially yours,

CHARLES H. JOHNSON, M.D.

If the debtor calls up, in nine cases out of ten he will say, "No, there is nothing between us, but you know how it is—a man has to live. There are all my other bills to pay." The doctor must be careful not to get into an argument; it would be easy to point out that the debtor's other bills have not run for so long a time, but to begin such a conversation would not produce the money and might lose the customer.

"All right," he answers, "I certainly am relieved that Miss Harrison misunderstood the situation. Then won't you please

write me out a check for ten dollars"—suited the amount to the size of the total indebtedness and to his knowledge of the customer's situation—"and Miss Harrison will send you a reminder for that amount every two weeks until we get it cleared up. That will take care of it without embarrassing you and it will get the thing off our minds."

If the debtor comes in instead of calling up by telephone, he will probably bring the money. If not, a conversation similar to the one above can be held. Above all, the conversation must be short and definite. The doctor's manner assumes that the patient is fully willing to pay, and now the difficulties are removed, for he will, of course, accept the very liberal arrangement. This manner will shame the customer into accepting the terms offered. Then the doctor can either change the subject or can arrange to have the secretary call him out, so as to break off the conversation.

**Further Steps.**—The foregoing methods, as every physician will recognize, will collect almost every collectible account or provide an arrangement for payment. But if efforts to secure an interview fail, the doctor may turn the account over to a collector either with or without previous warning, or he may send out another letter appealing to fair play and goodwill.

If these fail and if the patient is one whose goodwill he wishes to retain, he should write a letter definitely reselling his services. Let him remember that unless he does so, his patient is lost to him forever, for it is an axiom in collection that no one will trade where he owes a bill.

Consider, too, how this fact affects his ability and his duty to serve the community. Through no fault of his own a barrier has been raised to prevent this person's calling him in at a time of need. Like the wise and skilful credit man in a mercantile house he realizes that this may injure his customer much more than it does himself.

**A Resale Letter.**—In the final attempt at resale, the physician may stress both the personal and the professional elements of the doctor-client relation, as in the following letter:

My dear Mr. Brown:

This is my last appeal to you in connection with the settlement of your account. Unless it brings a response I shall be compelled, much against my will, to place the account in the hands of a collector.

You will, I believe, admit that when Mrs. Brown was taken suddenly and seriously ill in July, it was fortunate that I was near by, with the knowledge, the experience, and the equipment that were so necessary in the emergency.

I hope to be able to be here to serve you and my other clients for many years, but frankly, I cannot live here and continue my service unless my clients pay their bills. I have paid my supplier for the drugs and supplies I used in caring for Mrs. Brown and Caroline. Don't you consider it fair to reimburse me?

Cordially yours,

CHARLES H. JOHNSON, M.D.

**"Would You Hesitate to Call Me?"**—Here is a letter written by a country physician to a well-to-do farmer whom he knew personally. The man was really fond of this doctor and would have gone to almost any length to avoid calling in another physician. Still he owed the doctor fifty dollars which had been due for some months. Besides repeated statements he had been spoken to twice about the account, but had put the doctor off easily. After thinking the matter over the physician sent him this letter.

Dear Mr. Wilson:

If Jack were to fall sick tonight would you hesitate to call me?

I don't believe you would, and I certainly hope you wouldn't. But sometimes you know when a man owes a bill for goods which is long overdue, he hesitates to trade in the same place because that lack of payment stands in the way.

You know I would come to your family and give them the best service in my power as a matter of friendship whether you ever paid me a cent or not, and I am going to believe that you and I are too good friends for you to take offense at my very frank letter, which is written only because I sincerely believe that you had never thought of the matter in just this way. If I am right, won't you send me a check for a part of the amount you owe me? If I am wrong, come in tomorrow and have it out with me and I will apologize.

Sincerely yours,



**Etiquette or Merely Bad Business?**—The doctor who has many accounts on his books and is unwilling to undertake regular collection may well think again about the points made early in this chapter. Does professional etiquette really demand the sacrifices involved in letting his accounts slide? Or is the situation due merely to an inherited bad practice, capable of being reformed without violating etiquette? Will not reform actually improve his ability to render service to his community, especially as it can be undertaken in such a way as to make friends instead of lose them?

**Collections for Legal Services.**—The strength of the lawyer's position in making collections is vastly greater than that of the doctor, for several reasons. First, he can decline to accept the case, which gives him the privilege of making credit. Second, he usually accepts a retaining fee in advance, which constitutes an admission by the client of the value of the service to be obtained. Third, his own knowledge of the law entrenches him in a strong position if it becomes necessary to press his claim for payment.

The unfamiliar or intangible nature of many of the lawyer's services, however, may at times make his collections slow or difficult. His client may be inclined to question the value set upon some of these items in the account, and while he does not raise the issue openly, he withholds payment on this score. It is highly important that the lawyer shall not get into an argument over these matters, but is quite proper for him either at the time of rendering account or after his early statements or letters have gone without effect, to offer to explain any item which may not be clear.

Usually he has not the advantage possessed by the physician of an intimate acquaintance with his customer; neither has he his corresponding disadvantage. His client in most cases will be less sensitive about allowing his account to drag than he would be with regard to a similar doctor's bill. The latter is more like money owed to a personal friend, while the lawyer's bill has a more strictly business character. Accordingly the lawyer should be doubly businesslike in following up his accounts promptly and regularly.

**Resale Methods for Lawyers.**—But the lawyer is as much interested as any other business man in keeping the practice he has built up. Although the nature of his profession gives him a thorough knowledge of harsh collection methods, he does not wish to use them lest he alienate goodwill. His chief aim in case of difficulty should be to reach an arrangement for part payment, and this he can undertake without hesitation at the beginning of his collection procedure whenever in his judgment it is unwise to ask for full payment at once. On this occasion it may be effective to say,

We wish to be in a position to give you service in the future should occasion require. Accordingly may we respectfully ask your check in settlement of the enclosed account?

All the collection appeals possible to the business man lie open to the lawyer's use. In letters written under different circumstances and to different types of clients he can ring the changes on pride, goodwill, self-interest, etc., and adapt to his purposes letters that have succeeded in the mercantile field.

He has unusual advantage, it need hardly be said, in pressing for settlement in cases when reasonable methods have been without avail. He can say,

It should be unnecessary for us to point out that our knowledge of legal procedure makes it quite certain we shall be successful in collecting this bill. Why should you add by your delay to costs that eventually you must pay?

## CHAPTER 33

### THE QUICK "CLEAN-UP"

**Methods for the "Short Run."**—"I am interested in methods that will succeed in the long run," said a prominent manufacturer. "My credit and collection department must be reformed and put on a broad basis. I shall begin right away with every new customer that comes to me. But what shall I do with my old customers who have got into bad habits and keep me short of capital because they are so far overdue? I demand methods which can be used with my established trade right away—methods that will succeed in the long run will be all right, but they may be too late to save me from embarrassment. I require methods that will succeed in the short run."

This manufacturer was truly in an embarrassing situation. To judge by the standards of any sound collection system, many of his accounts were so far overdue that it was time to adopt stringent methods. But while this would get the money, it would almost certainly lose many of the customers. The manufacturer felt that his own lack of system in the past had been partly to blame. Instead of educating his customers into good methods, "selling them credit," and "reselling" them in the early stages of collection, he had carelessly "given credit away," used a lax routine that kept him apologizing for his mistakes, and in collection had used lifeless mechanical letters that his trade easily learned to disregard.

Many business men, both wholesalers and retailers, are in the same situation; they would like to reform, but how? Moreover, nobody wants to confess that his past system has been defective, for it will increase his difficulties in collecting the money already on the books.

**Getting on a Sound Basis—The Solution.**—The only way to solve the problem is to make a clean break with the past,

to install a new system, and then to tell one's customers about it, laying all possible emphasis on the resale element in the situation. Suppose a manufacturer finds himself confronted with the unpleasant option of enforcing his terms or reducing the quality of his line. He can send out a letter to his trade whose accounts are overdue, explaining that in the face of an advancing market he can either raise prices, lower the quality of his goods, or ask frankly for their hearty cooperation in maintaining his terms. Perhaps he has already made price advances, and can point out that he wishes to avoid others. He may even find himself in such an uncomfortable position that it will be worth while to offer an extra discount for prompt payment within a specified time, and then to send out an urgent follow-up to reach the customer just before the time limit has expired. The difficulty with this method is that if it does not bring in the money, collections will be all the harder from these customers who have refused to respond to the powerful motives of self-interest and money-saving.

**How to Handle a "Clean-Up."**—The following plan has been found most successful when a "clean-up" of outstanding accounts has become necessary at the same time that a new system and procedure of collections is to be installed.

1. If the emergency is not very great, send out a letter thanking customers for their patronage, asking payment of their balance, and explaining the measures the house is taking for their advantage. A thorough resale of the goods and service of the house can be included, and the appeal throughout can be made on the basis of the customer's own interests, without suggestion of any financial stringency. Such a letter will succeed in most instances with that portion of the trade which is really able to pay; because it carries the suggestion that the payment is being invested for the customer's own benefit.

2. If the situation is a little more urgent, add to the foregoing an appeal to goodwill and cooperation, and say that your past dealings have given you confidence that your present

measures will be supported in the same spirit of goodwill and cooperation that have always existed between you.

3. If the situation is still more urgent, speak more frankly of the problem that confronts you and awaken a slight fear that on his next order the customer may not receive the same values or service that he has received hitherto, unless he becomes more prompt in his payments and sends in the amount already overdue. This is a good situation in which to resell the value of credit.

4. But if the credit hold on the customer is so slight that he is likely to take his orders elsewhere, after receiving this kind of letter, and if the creditor's need of cash is so urgent that he must take some steps, then an offer of a cash discount may be advisable. A retailer may find it more to his advantage to offer some article out of his stock or specially purchased for the occasion as an inducement to clean up an old account.

5. One of the best methods of treating this situation is to ask the customer to take a trade acceptance. The creditor can make this fall due at a definite time in the future, thus allowing the debtor perhaps a month more in which to meet the obligation. He may offer an extra per cent or more off the amount of the bill if the trade acceptance is used, frankly explaining that he can afford to do this. This method is businesslike and does not necessitate making admissions that reflect unpleasantly on the creditor's financial condition, because the trade acceptance is generally regarded as an emergency measure but serviceable also under normal conditions.

Having made a start toward a "clean-up," special letters should be written to meet the succeeding situations. One follow-up should be prepared to be sent after a suitable interval to customers who are not taking advantage of the offer made or have not replied at all to the first letter. A strong appeal to the sense of fair play is the best measure to adopt here, while in the case of small accounts some endeavor to make the customer feel a little ashamed of himself will be serviceable as an element in the letter.

**Preventing a Relapse.**—A “clean-up” of this kind will go far toward relieving the immediate needs of the creditor. But how about the future? Will not the former lax habits of his customers reassert themselves after this unusual exertion? The answer is that he must keep after them by means of courteous, educational measures, referring occasionally to the points that his “clean-up” letters have established.

One wholesaler has found it advisable to attach to all invoices sent to customers who have been slow pay, a printed sticker containing the following words:

In view of the business conditions now prevailing as explained in our correspondence, may we respectfully ask your cooperation in prompt settlement of the present invoice. This firm will accept your action as evidence of your goodwill.

Another manufacturer who was unwilling to appear to be dunning his customers before the account was due, placed a similar sticker on the first statement, and reports not only unusually prompt payment, but entire absence of offense.

To those not responding to the first or second statement, a rather long and friendly letter could be sent, asking them to take a note or a trade acceptance in view of the special market conditions now prevailing. Since the whole collection procedure is being made more urgent, the letters, stickers, etc., must be more explanatory and must carry a tone of unmistakable friendliness so that the customer will understand the general nature of the step taken, and will not feel that this unusual urgency is directed at him personally.

**A Lesson From a Country Editor.**—“But,” says the retail merchant, or his big brothers the jobbers and manufacturers, “this is all theory. These reforms are nice to talk about but they can’t be put into practice.”

On the contrary, modern business affords so many illustrations of splendid success in bringing careless customers to the right-about-face that it is hard to select the best examples. The two following are given from among many that came

within the writer's own experience, because they represent success in the most unlikely cases.

Is there any man whose traditional weakness in collections is greater than the country editor's? If one is to believe all the jokes at his expense, no one ever pays him for past subscriptions, while a new subscriber is welcomed with extravagant gratitude. The editor even adds to his own bad reputation and "fouls his own nest" with humorous items about the dozen eggs or the basket of potatoes which some one has paid him on account. He puts on his front page items like the following: "This week eight brand new subscribers, princes of the earth, came in to take the vows of fealty and received in return a certificate which permits them to peruse our records for a year and browse on the news gleaned from this little spot of the world. Our welcome for you new readers is as true and hearty as though you came in company with a myriad more. Gladly do we enter your names on our cards and escort you to a place in the circle of light."

A few years ago the writer was asked to investigate collection methods for the benefit of a state association of newspaper men. Among the energetic and businesslike editors who told of their experience, was one who had been more than commonly successful in "taking the bull by the horns" and changing at one blow from credit to cash.

"How did you do it?" I asked him.

"Well," he answered with a smile, "I sent them a nice taffy letter. It was the most successful stroke of business I have used in twenty-three years. This single letter brought me in nearly a thousand dollars and practically every 'live account' paid one year in advance. I was able to buy a new press with the money. I don't know what made it succeed as it did, except its novelty and the fact that it hit the spot."

**The Thousand-Dollar Letter.**—Here is the letter that brought in the money and made friends in the bargain. The reader may judge for himself whether its appeals to goodwill, pride, and self-interest can be adapted to his own collection situation.

Dear Subscriber and Friend:

I am putting up a proposition to you that will benefit you really more than it will me, if you accept it, and if you will read this letter through you will see how you are the one who will be benefited.

I know you are willing to do your share toward making The Press a better paper. You want more news in it, though many of you say it's the best paper in the county now. It is by such cooperation as I am now asking that you can help make it more newsy and consequently a better paper.

I am sure you will appreciate the situation. We want you to have a better paper in 193- than ever before and we do not want to stop there; we want it better every year. We want it said that we have the best paper in Northern Wisconsin, and that paper is The Press.

My proposition is simply that you take advantage of the present and pay your subscription at least one year in advance, or more; and the more years you pay for, the more you will gain.

To speak candidly, we are proud of the names we have on our subscription list, for they represent the intelligence and the integrity of this whole community.

If these same good and loyal citizens could take one glance at our books they would be appalled at the amount of money that is due us on subscriptions to this paper. They are small amounts individually, ranging from 50 cents to \$2 or \$3, marked up against men and women whose words are as good as their bonds.

But we cannot pay our own bills with the honor and the integrity of our subscribers. We put up the cash.

I want to make some improvements in our equipment, and if the money (there is now over \$2,000 past due) is paid in at one time it will do us a whole lot of good—much more than if only a few subscribers pay in dribblets scattered through the year.

Will you pay up your back subscription? Will you help us make The Press "so much a better paper that there will be no comparison"? Your subscription was paid to . . . . . 193...  
\$. . . . will pay you to . . . . . 1st, 193...

Send check, draft, or money order. DO IT TODAY.

Very truly yours,

**A Reformed Grocery Business.**—Two boys of nineteen and twenty-two years respectively were presented by their father, a prosperous grocer in a Wisconsin city, with the stock and goodwill of a run-down grocery store which he had purchased in another part of town. A thriving competitor was located across the street. "See what you can do with it," he



told them. The youthful merchants decided to begin on the right basis. Their capital was limited, but they had the doubtful privilege of attempting to collect the ancient accounts of their predecessor. While they were about it, they determined to change their terms from thirty days to two weeks, because an analysis of their possible trade showed that it was mostly made up of railroad employees who were paid up every two weeks. They issued this letter to all the families in their possible trade territory :

Dear Madam :

The new firm of Johnson Bros., Grocers, at the corner of Park and Kent, offers its services to the families in this vicinity.

A pleasant, clean, wholesome-looking store will be our first endeavor. Come in and see how well we look after our remodeling.

Prices a little lower than you find elsewhere, based on our first-class business methods. A slip will accompany every purchase made on a charge account and your bill will be sent you promptly at the end of every two weeks, the time when you find it most convenient to pay. This will prevent the annoyance of having a large bill to pay at the end of the month, and is a service we are sure you will appreciate.

Standard lines of groceries that you can trust.

Courteous, prompt, intelligent service.

Just as an example of our endeavor to make this the best grocery store in this part of the city we want you to come in to our Saturday special sale and please meet us and get acquainted. We want to know you and to be able to serve you.

Yours truly,

For all customers having past-due accounts a special letter was issued practically the same as the foregoing, but urging them to—

Pay up now or come in and talk it over with us. We know that we have your goodwill in our new business and we want your help in giving you a first-class grocery store in this part of the city.

These letters were backed up by vigorous advertising of the Saturday special sales which were made the occasion for credit interviews with all new customers. Within a year the store was in a strong financial position and had a thriving

patronage. Excellent returns were received from old accounts and the change to bimonthly payments was so successful that it was presently followed by many other merchants.

**"Pay or I'll Shoot!"**—While diplomacy rather than force is the keynote of modern attempts to make quick collections, the latter method has been used occasionally for at least three or four centuries. The classic instance is that of Benvenuto Cellini, celebrated goldsmith and all-round genius of the sixteenth century.

Mitchell Brothers, Inc., of Bridgeport, Conn., uses this early example in the following letter:

Dear Mr. \_\_\_\_\_:

An anecdote is told about Benvenuto Cellini, the celebrated 16th Century goldsmith and master of all trades.

It seems that Cellini, after months of painstaking labor upon a cunningly wrought gold vase that he had been commissioned to make for the Bishop of Salamanca, was unable to collect his fee. The Bishop took the attitude, "Try and get it!" Exasperated and in need of the funds, Cellini called upon the lagging debtor one day and, pointing his pistol at him, exclaimed, "Pay or I shoot!" The Bishop paid and Cellini went on his way rejoicing.

This simple and direct method of collection has its parallel in business today. When every other amicable means of getting our money has been exhausted and the debtor, as did the Bishop, simply refuses to pay, we say, "Pay or we shoot!" And we mean it. Our "gun" is the (name of a collection company), and it never misses.

Don't force us to unlimber this weapon to collect your account. We don't like to shoot the darn thing off because it makes a big noise and somebody always gets hurt.

P.S. The amount of your overdue account is \$.....

Today most companies prefer to dictate special letters when accounts reach the point where a threat of suit becomes necessary.

Here is a form, however, which is said to be productive of good results.

Dear Mr. ....:

"I am sorry to inform you that the ..... Company has filed suit against you for a (month) item amounting to \$.....; and it will be necessary for you to answer this suit and show cause for refusing to pay this claim."

I am sure that if you should receive such a notice, it would cause you anxiety. But that is just what will happen if you do not remit promptly the amount I have mentioned.

We have reminded you several times by letter and have even sent a telegram urging settlement; but as yet you have not given us even the courtesy of an explanation of the delay.

This is our last notice; and if your check is not received, the next letter will come from our attorney, notifying you that suit has been filed.

You can save yourself a lot of trouble and perhaps extra expense by remitting promptly. So we hope that you will permit us to continue our friendly relations by sending the check now and not allowing the matter to go to court.

Very truly yours,

Here is a letter that goes out over the signature of the president of a manufacturing company:

Gentlemen:

Do you want us to place in the hands of a lawyer your account of \$....., covering merchandise shipped to you?

We don't want to because we don't like lawsuits with our customers,  
BUT—

We have sent you our statements, have asked you repeatedly for our money, and now the account is months overdue! If you don't pay us willingly, what else is there for us to do?

IT'S UP TO YOU!

Are you, therefore, going to compel us to hand the matter over to our attorney on (date), or will you have your check in our hands by (date)?

**Using "Attorney Letters" for Quick Action.**—Some debtors who pay little or no attention to an ordinary series of

“period letters” are particularly sensitive to a communication threatening to place the account in the hands of an attorney for collection. Ordinarily the “attorney letter” is the credit manager’s last card, and is sent only after a long series of reminders based on resale arguments and appeals to the debtor’s sense of fair play. In certain cases, however, it is desirable to send the attorney letter without waiting so long.

This plan is followed, with considerable success, by some manufacturers who market their product through local branches or agencies. Here, for example, are two letters which have been used by a nationally known shoe manufacturer :

Gentlemen :

Our collection department has just called my attention to the fact that a balance of \$100 has been due on your account for more than 60 days.

The collection department has asked : “What shall we do about this? They pay no attention to our requests and have not even offered to pay part of the amount. Hadn’t we better turn this account over to our attorney?”

I am satisfied that there must be some unusual reason for your neglect of this matter. Frankly, I dislike very much to ask our attorney to collect money due us, although sometimes it is the only thing to do.

May I suggest that you forward a check immediately to pay your account, or, if that is impossible, that you pay the larger part at once, and tell us when you will pay the balance?

We have been doing business together for a long time with satisfactory relations, thus establishing complete confidence on both sides. While I am disappointed regarding the account, I still feel sure that it is your intention to do the right thing. Back up my judgment by sending your check in the next mail.

Very truly yours,

CREDIT MANAGER

It will be noted that in the first letter the reference to the attorney is somewhat guarded. The credit manager plants the idea that he is standing between the agency manager and the collection department. In the second letter, however, the threat of collection by attorney is made specific, and there are two references to possible closing of the agency :

Gentlemen:

The collection department has placed on my desk the folder of your correspondence, with the recommendation that we send your account to our attorney for collection. This would, of course, automatically close the BLANK agency for all time.

You cannot blame the collection department for its conclusion, because you have made no response to its several letters. However, I cannot bring myself to take any drastic action without first writing you personally. If we sue we shall get our money. But we take greater satisfaction in our friendly relationship, which a suit would destroy.

Your friendship I wish to keep, and I am confident that you wish to keep ours, so I have instructed the collection department to delay proceedings until I could write you personally.

Do not fail me now, as I cannot delay matters again. You should avoid attorney handling with attendant expensive court costs which you must assume. This would automatically close the BLANK agency—to my mind a great loss. Your check here by ..... will prevent this.

Use the enclosed special addressed envelope and your reply will come direct to my office.

Very truly yours,

CREDIT MANAGER

**Taking a New Tack.**—On the other hand, the quick clean-up is sometimes expedited by a letter which avoids threats entirely, and surprises the debtor by its good-natured, easy-going tone. A good example, reported by Dr. F. W. Dignan, is this letter written by the credit manager of the Cracker Jack Company to a candy company in Detroit:

Gentlemen:

Well, today is the first of February, and it looks here in Chicago as if we were going to have some pretty nice weather.

It isn't cold—almost like a spring day. We hope it is the same in Detroit, for this is the kind of weather that will get you the most business.

You see we are wishing the best we can for your business, because when your business is good it will help you to pay a little on that past-due account you owe.

How has it been? Good enough to give us something on account? We'd appreciate it if you could.

Very truly yours,

This account was one on which several members of the Cracker Jack Company's credit department had labored in vain for some time, but the above letter brought the following prompt reply:

Gentlemen:

Your nice letter of February first is here today. Who wrote this letter? I should like to have his name and address, so I can send him a good box of candy.

Enclosed you will find check for \$50 on account. If my credit is still good, please send me 25 more cases of Cracker Jack.

Very truly yours,

To complete this correspondence, here is the letter the credit manager of the Cracker Jack Company returned on receipt of the check and new order:

Gentlemen:

We certainly were pleased to get your check for \$50, which we have applied on your account.

We also appreciated your courteous letter. I should be glad to send my name and address for that box of candy you want to send me, but really it isn't my doings at all.

I only tried to express the policy of our house. If you are pleased with the consideration we have shown you, please understand that it is only what we have always tried to do.

I am glad that you really appreciate what we in Chicago are trying to do for our friends. We are just as much interested in their welfare as they are themselves.

Isn't it great when we can reach our hands across the miles of space between us and say in a friendly way: "John, what can we do to help you?" and he comes back with a nice letter like the one you wrote me and tells us just what his trouble is?

It means a lot to both of us. We want you always to feel that we have that spirit.

We have shipped your order. Your credit is always good with us, and working together the way we are, it will always be kept good.


Very truly yours,

**The "Courtesy Reminder."**—Debtors who are callous to collection letters, particularly if they have the earmarks of

# H. T. POINDEXTER & SONS MDSE. CO.

ESTABLISHED 1907      WHOLESALERS AND JOBBERS      SELLING TO MERCHANTS ONLY

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40,000 CUSTOMERS IN 40 STATES

WARM & COOL FABRICS STAPLE COTTON PIECE GOODS DOMESTICS BLANKETS TOWELS SCHOOL SUPPLIES NOTIONS GIFT NOVELTIES 50 & 10¢ NOVELTIES HANDKERCHIEFS TOYS CANDIES	HOUSEHOLD HARDWARE FINEWORKS VARIETY GOODS WORK CLOTHING READY TO-WEAR MEN & FURNISHINGS LADIES' DRESSES SHOES MILLINERY KNIT GOODS HOSIERY BRACKET SUNSHIRTS
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**KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI**

PHONES VICTOR 0480

# PLEASE

Figure 20. "Courtesy Reminder" (amount due typed in)

form series, will sometimes respond to a mere typed reminder of the amount owed, if it is sent in some ingenious form that catches the eye. Such a reminder, illustrated in Figure 20, is used with good effect by the H. T. Poindexter & Sons Merchandise Company of Kansas City, Mo.

As will be seen by reference to the illustration, it is simply the company's regular letterhead, with no extra printing but the word "PLEASE" (in red). The amount is typed in, just above the red-ink appeal.

**Special Clean-Up Letters.**—While emergency collection letters should not be too long, they should be long enough to bring out clearly the mutuality of interest which makes seller and buyer both passengers in the same boat. Manufacturers and wholesalers, in collecting from retailers, do well to flavor their letters with references to terms and conditions peculiar to the trade. An appeal for cooperation, for the benefit of an industry or a specific line of business, will often succeed where threats and recriminations fail.

**Using "Business Service."**—Quick clean-up letters are particularly effective if they bring in some phase of what members of the National Association of Credit Men know as "business service." The main objective of this idea, which now constitutes an important part of the Association's program, is the giving of aid to businesses which face serious difficulties but are worth saving. Some of the local associations have special departments for the carrying on of this work. Others conduct the business service program as a general activity of the local unit. In either case, the close cooperation of interested creditors is an important factor in the plan.

The three main lines of business service procedure are:

1. A survey to determine the actual condition of the business.
2. Recommendations as to how the business may be helped.
3. Such further investigation as is necessary to learn whether the recommendations have been put into effect, and what the results have been.



Collection correspondence may be tied into this plan at any of the three stages of procedure. The second stage—that of specific recommendations as to how the business may be improved—offers perhaps the best opportunities for suggestions that will help the customer to work out of his difficulties, and at the same time make him feel like sending a payment on account if he can possibly do so.

The following letter, from the credit department of a wholesale house to an independent grocer, indicates one application of the business service idea, hooked up with a collection appeal:

Dear Mr. Smith:

Right now you are facing a big problem. So are we. Yours is to keep your business going in the face of keen competition from the chain stores, and ours is to help you do it.

Your problem calls for two things—good salable groceries at a fair price and effective advice as to how to display and sell them.

Ours calls for one—prompt payment for the goods we send you. We are giving you the advice free—suggestions on how to arrange your equipment, display your stock, keep your books and collect your bills.

We are glad to give you this help without charge, but we really must have cash for the groceries we put on your shelves.

We are doing our part. We have to pay for the groceries we sell you. To be specific, we have heavy bills to meet just a week from today.

May we depend on you for some team-work? If you will send us, at once, an even hundred dollars on account of January and February invoices, we shall appreciate it very much.

We want to help you to continue a profitable business. Here is your chance to show us that you realize how much you need our help. We shall look forward with confidence to receiving your check.

Very truly yours,

**Special Trade Conditions.**—Manufacturers and wholesale distributors are often able, because of their special knowledge of country-wide conditions and trends, to give valuable information and counsel to their retailer customers. The merchant may be uneasy or discouraged because of what seem to him to be alarming changes and fluctuations in the trade. His

greatest need is to have his fears allayed and his mind set at rest about the future of his own business. Here is a particularly fruitful opportunity for business service. The following letter, from a wholesale druggist to one of his customers, shows how encouragement and collection may be combined in a single communication:

Dear Mr. Jones:

We have a double-barreled reason for writing this letter.

One barrel is to quiet your mind a little about general conditions in the drug trade. The other is to remind you of that July invoice for \$48.75, which is long past due, and which we need to have cleared up within the next five days, sure.

First, don't allow yourself to be upset, as some retail druggists have been, by changing conditions in the trade.

We know that it is often remarked that "today you can buy everything in a drug store but drugs." You have your specialties, we know, and your lunch counter and soda fountain, but you are still running a drug store, with an A-1 prescription department, and we want you to feel sure that you are going to be glad of it in the long run.

We are with you. We hope to continue to supply you with the best obtainable pharmaceuticals for many years to come. We can do this if you'll do your part, and just now your part consists in sending, today, check for that past-due item of \$48.75.

We'll be looking for it. And also looking for anything we can do to help you make a good business better.

Very truly yours,

**Brass Tack Suggestions.**—The welfare of the wholesaler, and to a large extent that of the manufacturer, depends on the continuing business of enough retail merchants to insure the required factory or jobbing volume. Every retailer who disappears from the picture means either that another must be found or that volume will be correspondingly reduced. The heavy mortality among retailers, due to keen chain store competition, has taught both manufacturer and wholesaler the vital necessity of helping the surviving retailers by giving them *definite* suggestions as to how they may hold and improve their business.

This situation is illustrated in the following letter, from a shoe manufacturer to a retailer of footwear:

Dear Mr. Brown:

When our salesman, Mr. Johnson, came in off the road last week we asked him particularly how things were going with your store.

We know about the new competition you have less than a block away, and we want to help you in every way we can to meet it successfully.

In the first place, your competitor has a new, fresh store. We wonder whether it would not pay you to spend a little money repainting the outside of your store, and a bit more on improving the interior lighting, so that your stock will show up to better advantage.

In addition, we venture to make two suggestions about your general plan of operation. From what Mr. Johnson tells us we are inclined to think that you are trying to carry too many styles. Wouldn't it be better to have fewer lines and push them more vigorously?

The other suggestion is that you see whether you can't get a better turnover on your extra items, such as slippers and rubbers. You might have some slips printed, with RUBBERS in good big type, and paste them on your windows on rainy days.

One more suggestion—and this is one that will help us. Can't you reduce your past-due items for January by sending us a check as soon as you receive this? Fifty dollars will be fine. We are sure you will be willing to reduce your indebtedness to us by that modest amount.

Very truly yours,

**Seasonal Opportunities.**—In virtually every line of retail trade there are products that can be pushed, with a reasonable expectation of satisfactory sales, at certain seasons of the year. Christmas trade is, of course, the outstanding example of this, but there are scores of other seasonal appeals and many of them are overlooked by the retailer unless his supplier (who should be also his guide, philosopher, and friend) reminds him of them.

This chance for business service is taken advantage of in the following letter from a manufacturer of arms and ammunition to a retail hardware dealer:

Dear Mr. Black:

In return for that check for \$62.30 we feel sure you are going to send us right away, because you owe it and we need it, we are going to give you a sales idea that will enable you to get back the \$62.30 in a very short time.

We hear that game is very plentiful this fall in the country surrounding your town. That means that you should be able to sell a good quantity of shells and cartridges, to say nothing of an occasional shotgun or rifle.

Here's the idea: just wire us, collect, "Sending check; please forward cut-out." The minute we get the telegram we'll start in your direction a fine big cut-out of a hunter with dog and gun, advertising the shells you bought last month.

That will make any man with good red blood start for the woods at the earliest possible moment. You can use the cut-out for a background, and fill your window with guns and ammunition.

For our mutual benefit—send that wire now!

Very truly yours,

## CHAPTER 34

### COOPERATION—FIRST AID TO COLLECTION

**Insolvency, Insincerity, or Instalments.**—Many executives have adopted business service methods because the system gives them a rational alternative to bankruptcy in dealing with certain cases. Worthless promises they do not consider a rational alternative. What ground have they for believing that a hard-pressed merchant who has long been slow pay, and who has even failed to live up to an arrangement for part payments, will suddenly manage to reform? The tide of his fortune may turn of its own accord, but these executives prefer to lend it a helping hand. They are reluctant to offer instalment payments, but they prefer this to bankruptcy and the probable loss of what is due them; while they are equally averse to accepting promises to pay the full amount by a certain date, when they know these hopeful anticipations are "writ in water." When offered the alternatives of "insolvency, insincerity, or instalments," they choose the least of these evils.

"But," object some credit men, "if a merchant is going to fail anyway, better press him hard and get your money, even if it does send him to the wall a little sooner." That this course is sometimes necessary, no one will doubt. "But why be so certain," say others, "that failure is inevitable? The man certainly will drown if you pull away the plank; but possibly if you throw him a life-preserver, he may struggle to shore. Looked at only from the cold-blooded point of view, a merchant saved through your efforts is a good friend thereafter. Bankrupts order no goods."

The policy of offering helpful advice to customers whose accounts are past due, as well as allowing the usual extensions of time, is no mere theory, but in various forms is actively used by many houses, and has stood the acid test. Those who

use it most will tell you many stories of disappointment, of men who could not or would not be saved; but they tell you also of men who have been put on their feet in a financial crisis, or have been brought to right practices by a bit of earnest advice, and have become prosperous merchants.

**Ambassadors of the Diplomacy of Business.**—A friendly salesman in his shirt-sleeves, working energetically after hours to sweep up a customer's floor or to fix a window display for the big sale tomorrow, is a practical demonstrator of the goodwill of his house. He can put ginger into the merchant who was ready to give up without another struggle. "I always do some real physical work for the fellow whom the house has sent me out to see, with the order to 'find out what is the matter with Brown and try if you can't get him to send us some money.' Brown's discouragement affects him like the palsy, and the sight of somebody stirring around gets him into action, warms up his blood, and gives him some hope of life." So spoke a salesman, who would be surprised if you called him an ambassador of the diplomacy of business, but who has earned that title by the success with which he aids the diplomatic credit man in the home office to secure payments on doubtful accounts.

After analyzing many of their most troublesome accounts, some houses have decided that a lack of knowledge of business is one of the most frequent causes of failure to pay. The customer does not lack good intentions, but he either does not know the source of his weakness, or he does not feel it strongly enough to be willing to reform. Frequently a word spoken in season, particularly if it comes from the man who checks his orders for shipment, and at a time when the customer is asking some favor, will do a world of good. Sometimes a series of suggestions extended over a period of years is necessary in order to root out established bad habits. What is most needed? That depends. Perhaps it is education in the principles of credit, carried on in letter after letter; perhaps it is an accounting system that will show the merchant where he stands; perhaps it is conservative buying; perhaps it is better

collection methods; perhaps the merchant has been trying to run a real estate business and a shoe business at the same time, and needs to get rid of one or the other.

**Helping the Customer to Help Himself.**—The story of the experience of one famous manufacturing firm with the installation of a business service policy is worth telling in their credit man's own words. "We had an account in Indiana," said the credit man, "a good fellow personally, but he couldn't pay us. I said to our president, 'Why couldn't we hire somebody to put Jones's business on a decent foundation? Isn't Morris—one of our salesmen—the very man?' Our president agreed with me and sent Morris down to this town. The merchant owed us seven or eight thousand dollars. Morris sized up the situation and made up his mind that the business opportunity was good, but that the owner would never make a success. So he conducted a big sale, and through his knowledge of the trade, found a buyer for the business. Morris used to be a successful merchant in our line before becoming a salesman. Now we are using him more and more for this kind of work. If a customer is honest and has ability, Morris can help him out. He knows store systems; he knows how to conduct sales; and if a man needs stirring up by a campaign of publicity, he knows how to put that on for him, too.

"In the old days, in some businesses I know, the sales and credit departments were constantly at loggerheads. The credit manager was often a sour old fellow who had been at the job for many years and had found the easiest thing he could do was to turn down orders. If that was all my job as credit man amounted to, I wouldn't take it. There would be nothing constructive in it. But to get hold of a concern that needs guidance and to direct it so that its owner can make something of himself—that is the only real fun in being a credit man.

"We consider now that our business is to make merchants out of storekeepers. Our salesmen have become enthusiastic over it, though not without some difficulty. One of our salesmen said that his job was to sell goods, not to sell advertising, but he came around to the right point of view. And the other

day he told me, with a chuckle, 'On this trip I sold a man \$2,000 worth of goods and \$4,000 worth of advertising,' meaning that he had persuaded a customer to take on a campaign of advertising that would mean sales of \$4,000 to him.

"We make money by following out policies like this, but that is not so important. It is really carried on at very little expense, but even if it cost us more, we should be glad to do it. We are helping people help themselves."

**Pulling a Gun on the Overdue Customer.**—"When we have trouble in collecting," said the vice-president of a well-known jobbing house, "I believe in pulling a gun on the customer. And I want to show you the gun that I pull. He is one of my assistants in the credit department who is so full of ability to help the retail merchant out of trouble that I keep him on the road now more than half the time, attending to difficult cases. When he has once pulled a dealer through the thick of some trouble or other, that man can be handled by mail in the future. And the personal friendly acquaintance he acquires while on the road gives him an immense advantage in getting in the money from nearly all our trade. I went through some of the same experience myself," concluded the vice-president, "and in case of real need, I pack my bag and jump on the train to talk things over with a customer who is in difficulty."

**Choosing the Right Medicine.**—It must not be thought that these constructive dealers in credit pick up a slow and helpless account and nurse it along. In their judgment to prolong the life of a business consumptive is little short of criminal. But the eye of a skilled credit man can detect the indications of healthy life, where these exist, and diagnose the case properly.

In a Dakota city a certain manufacturer has a customer who has done business with him for fifteen years and for fifteen years has been slow pay. His father-in-law, who was his predecessor, had likewise been slow pay for nearly as long a period. At one time the customer's financial statement showed such a condition that the manufacturer wrote as follows:



Gentlemen:

We acknowledge receipt of your letter of the 27th in which you enclose a statement of your affairs showing total assets \$62,553, liabilities \$19,825.98, and a net worth of \$42,727.02.

A comparison of these figures with those of February 11 shows a loss of \$11,295.98. In addition you have valued the land in Colorado at \$7,500, whereas a year ago you valued it at \$6,400, so that your actual loss is \$12,395.98.

Your percentage of indebtedness has increased from 22.7 to 31.7. Your sales have decreased \$11,000; however, your expenses remain about the same.

Your stock of merchandise is unreasonably high and until it is reduced to at least 66⅔ per cent you will find it difficult to make any net profit in cash. You ought to start a special sale and not discontinue it until your stock reaches \$15,000. This is a difficult matter to accomplish, but the sooner you take your loss the better. If we can be of any help to you in writing your advertising, or in planning your sale, we shall be pleased to do what we can.

We assume that you have not given any security for the notes to banks and relatives, but should like to have your assurance in this regard.

Yours truly,

Despite this vigorous call to order, however, matters dragged along until in July the manufacturer, having added a field expert to his staff, sent him out to Dakota to look the ground over. The "ambassador" found a pair of honest and capable merchants doing business on wrong-headed principles and stubbornly sticking to them. His letter analyzing the position, which now lies in the files of the house, reads:

Gentlemen:

In reference to . . . . . of . . . . . , the condition there has come from trying to carry stock in all grades of merchandise from the cheapest and up, and then not making a whole-hearted cleanup after each season.

Then they have the idea that it was necessary to carry a \$40,000 stock to do a \$50,000 business, for fear some trade would get away. They keep a neat, clean store and their stock is in good condition, only it is \$20,000 too big, even for a \$50,000 annual business.

They are fine advertisers of our merchandise, using our cuts and display matter right through the selling season, but their efforts during the dull seasons have never been very enthusiastic, because they have been doing all they can to depreciate the sales end of it, even to running advertisements about the evil of sales.

They say they are paid up on spring bills, except ours, and a bill of summer stuff not due, and if they can do any July and August business they can clean it all up. They have only \$7,000 bought in all for fall and by keeping their future buying to this limit for the next two seasons, they can reduce down to something near normal and they say they will carry out our suggestions during the next year and find out if we are right. They think their expense will be a thousand less this year. If so, they will break about even if they do around a \$40,000 business.

Local prospects for fall business are very good, providing they can harvest the crop in sight. The wet weather which has continued during the past thirty days is doing a great deal of damage now and has made business very quiet for all lines.

Yours truly,

What this letter does not say is that the traveling representative talked tactfully for *two days* to the stiff-necked business men and that by the end of that time they saw the error of their ways. By an energetic sale, they cut down their stock to \$15,000 and since that educational experience have discounted every bill.

**Taking an Inventory of the Debtor.**—The choice between “insolvency, insincerity, and instalments” was made by one famous jobbing house at the request of a territorial manager, who thus instituted a policy which has been continued ever since. The account of a drygoods man in Colorado was so far overdue that the jobber, in conjunction with other large creditors, was ready to proceed to extremities and close him up. But the territorial manager had a strong feeling that other measures might be even more successful and persuaded the credit department to let him get out on the ground and see what could be done. He discovered after inventory and analysis that a crop failure in the district had made local collections impossible. The merchant had \$65,000 stock and \$18,000 on his books. The total of his indebtedness to creditors was \$26,000. The inventory showed a healthy condition. But what could be done? It remained to inventory the merchant himself and the entire local situation. Unfortunately the first inventory showed a total lack of the necessary asset—

courage. The drygoods man had thrown up his hands in despair. Lacking invention and resource in himself and feeling that his creditors were on his back like a pack of wolves, he had sat down to await the inevitable.

Thereupon the territorial sales manager took off his coat and began to work. The second part of the "inventory" showed that in one part of his territory the crop failure had been only partial. The problem was to get the business where the business existed. The stock was renovated by rearranging and a little judicious buying. A new store front was built at small expense with a loan from a banker who was encouraged by the jobber's interest. And, most important of all, a vigorous campaign of direct-by-mail advertising was started to the outlying territory using simple letters and folders gotten out by the local printer, giving interesting descriptions of the stock and offering week-end bargains.

In eight months the stock was satisfactorily reduced, the bills were paid, the business was preserved, and the merchant made money for himself and the far-sighted jobber. The "insolvency" method would have destroyed his stock; nobody would have paid more than twenty cents on the dollar for it. The merchant himself would have had nothing out of it, and, being too old to start in over again, would have gone to the poor house.

**Analysis on the Spot.**—The same jobbing house had a similar experience with a merchant whose showing was decidedly bad. The credit manager had determined to close him up. But again, the efficiency expert came to the front, saying, "That man, I believe, is good. Let me go down and see." The credit manager reluctantly agreed to give him a chance, but warned the efficiency man that his confidential information looked very black and the firm owed it to itself to take prompt action. But as is often the case, analysis of the situation on the spot disclosed many features which the merchant either could not or would not entrust to a statement made on paper.

The merchant himself, instead of sticking by the store, and giving it the benefit of his constructive energy, had been

traveling on the road for a local manufacturer, leaving all the business in care of his wife. Moreover, being the type of man who likes to have many strings to his bow and to look on himself as a local magnate, he had tied up part of his capital in a flour business, a fact quite unknown to his creditors. To complete the story, his wife, being a little timid, had granted credit accommodation indiscriminately. The net result was that, though the merchant's record had been good in the past, he now had with this jobber alone \$1,300 past due, and \$600 current.

A strong advertising campaign was the medicine recommended for this case. It reduced his stock and created local interest in the store. The merchant stopped his outside traveling, sold his flour business, and began to have a vision of the opportunities for a country retailer. In four months his bills were paid. But what was of vastly greater value, he had learned the force of constructive advertising and in a short time doubled his business. Needless to say, he has been a good customer of the jobber ever since.

**A Looted Business.**—Sometimes a credit man can tell a story of a business so heavily looted by its own proprietor that the most desperate efforts of financial counselors are almost in vain. One man lifts the veil from the operations of a merchant who built an expensive house in southern California and went to live there, taking out so much money from his Indiana store for living expenses that the manager he left in charge couldn't make the business go. For five years the credit manager has been nursing this house, partly because the business has possibilities, partly because he at one time gave advice that failed to bring results, and so he has considered himself bound to stand by the ship. Twice a year the field expert has visited him in this Indiana town, to go over his balance sheet and his merchandise. Lately, he has sent in his balance sheet every month for the credit man's advice. At one time he owed this firm, his largest creditor, as high as \$15,000. But at last, the struggle has succeeded; the firm has been incorporated with the manager as part stockholder, the owner in California has

been cut down on his "allowance," and the store is on a paying basis.

**Deceiving a "Silent Partner."**—Another story of a hard struggle is told by an assistant credit man who, beginning as a successful merchant, and then making a record as a salesman, was taken into the credit department of a direct selling manufacturer.

"The business I am going to tell you about was worth \$85,000, owned by a banker who was entrusting all the conduct of affairs to his partner. The store was constantly behind with every one, till at last the banker asked our advice. I went down on a New Year's day and the banker and I sat down in the directors' room and talked things over. 'I don't know,' he said, 'how my manager will take it.' However, I suggested that he take me up to the store as an efficiency man who travels around the country and who might be able to give some suggestions.

"The manager had the small-town point of view. He resented what he called my attempt to 'show him how to run his business.' In a few minutes I saw that he really knew nothing about the state of the business but guessed at everything. It was his habit to buy up bankrupt stock around the country at fifty cents on the dollar and then sell it at full price. 'Where is the rest of it?' I asked him. 'Is any of it still lying on the shelves?' But he gave an evasive answer.

"Next morning I came down to the store and found the manager more sullen than ever. His greeting was, 'Are you still here?' He even called up the banker and told him, 'I won't tell this fellow anything. You might as well send him home.' Nevertheless, I looked around the store a little that morning and made up my mind about a few things before meeting the banker at lunch. 'Your manager,' I told him, 'has in my estimate \$20,000 less goods than he should have to make you safe. More than that, I believe his expense is running up close to thirty per cent. Then too, I saw seven or eight clerks wrapping up merchandise and handing money to

the cashier. But they seem to be pretty good friends of some of their customers and I doubt if you are getting full price for all your goods. Give me a chance to take actual inventory of stock and I'll find out the truth.'

"Then the manager and the banker locked horns. The manager began to bluster. He called for a division of the profits and an immediate dissolution of the partnership, claiming that he had made \$20,000 and saying that he would be content to take his ten thousand and go. But the banker refused, because on the basis of my report, he had begun to think there might be a loss. Thereupon the manager discharged the clerks and locked the store and came down to the hotel to accuse me. I didn't have very much to say to him, being accustomed to do more thinking than talking, but I told him I had merely been called down to express an opinion and that I was sorry if matters hadn't turned out as he expected. I advised him to see an attorney before he kept that store locked very much longer. The attorney, of course, told him to open up as quick as he could. And then I got at the truth.

"Well, I disposed of this would-be manager for \$500. After a little talk he reduced his first claim of \$10,000 to \$5,000, but in the meantime I was going through the store, and told the banker to hold off. He was willing for the sake of avoiding trouble to give the manager \$1,000. Without saying anything as to the amount, I went down to call on the manager the next night with a lawyer and a pocket full of cash. We had a little conversation. Then I said to him, 'Your partner is willing to do the right thing for you, to give you a little money and release you from all liabilities.' I stood up by the parlor table and pulled out of my pocket \$500 in five-dollar bills and counted them out right then and there. Well, he took them and left.

"What did my investigation show? It showed that he was short \$18,000. His expense was costing him 32 per cent, and in the last year or six months had cost 38 per cent. His gross profit was not 40 per cent, as he supposed, but 28 per cent. No merchandise in the store was sold for the marked price.

"Today that store is running profitably. The banker knows the percentage cost of every item in the store and he knows just whether each clerk is selling enough to pay his salary. A genuine rock-bottom analysis of the business is constantly kept up.

"If merchants would only analyze, they could find out what is costing them money and what is making them money. One of our customers was struggling under a rental costing 14 per cent of his annual sales. Six per cent I consider high and 4 per cent good. Another man's clerks were costing him 14 per cent, where they should not have cost him more than 6 to 8 per cent."

**Financial Advice.**—Advice in financing can often be given by the credit manager whose familiarity with various expedients sends a beam of light through clouds that look like a cyclone to the less experienced merchant.

The familiar fault of continual overbuying had almost reduced a popular young merchant to extremities. He had begun with \$10,000 capital and a retail following that he thought would stay with him wherever he went. His first purchase was \$15,000 of stock on which he paid \$10,000. His fall purchases were \$21,000. In October the representative of the credit department visited him and asked how much stock he had on hand and ordered. He didn't know. But he did know that he was opening boxes all the time and that more were coming in. How then did he expect to pay \$21,000 for his fall purchases? He replied that he would get it from the bank. But a moment's conversation showed him to be carrying already as much as the local bank would allow. The representative of his creditor on analysis discovered that he had made \$28,000 profit, but on an expense of 26 per cent, which was too heavy. However, the stock was all new and no depreciation was necessary in the estimate. He was persuaded to incorporate and sold a heavy block of stock with the assistance of his friend, the expert. The latter also wrote letters to all his creditors, for he was being sued right and left. Last but not least, the friendly credit representative bolstered up the

merchant's courage, told him he had something in the middle of his back beside mush, and that if he would stiffen up and get to work, he could pull through. The result is a prosperous and well-financed business.

Another young merchant out of sheer gratitude for the helpful advice he had received, wrote to his principal creditor that two months more would see him broken, and invited the creditor to come down and "get his first." But an investigation on the spot showed that they had an equity of \$7,000 above their debts, the only misfortune being that a large amount of the capital was tied up in their store building and in a home which this man owned. His mistaken hypothesis was that if he owned these buildings he did not have to pay rent, and so he saved the money. It had never occurred to him that he couldn't pay bills with money that was invested in buildings and real estate.

His friends and the bank were persuaded to take over this property and letters were written to his creditors stating frankly what he was trying to do and asking for 60 days' more time, telling them that in 60 days their interests would at least be in no greater danger than they were then. Today this young merchant is conducting a successful clothing business.

**A Striking Success.**—"I shouldn't want to tell you even in what section of the country this man was located," said the wholesaler who recounted the following case, "because his success on following our advice was so spectacular that he might be recognized. But his good fortune has given us courage many a time to stick to what we know are right principles.

"Three partners opened business in this store with \$6,500. One of them was a wonderful salesman. They did \$24,000 the first year and then, on our advice, this man bought out first one and then the other of his partners. Last year he did a business of nearly \$200,000, and this year he will better that by a hundred thousand. His net profit last year was \$22,000. In seven years he has actually earned \$100,000.



"What is the secret? He put himself unreservedly in our hands. And let me tell you that when a man is willing to take our advice, we are very careful to give him the best we have. He is a man of charming personality, frank and open-hearted, and takes us fully into his confidence. He was guided very closely by our advice in the amount and the kind of his purchases. He wanted to put in a side line of other merchandise, but we advised against it and he kept free from it. Right now, we are laying out his windows and floor plan for a remodeled building. This man has the real sales instinct, and he has shown ability to learn merchandising also.

**A Good Salesman But No Business Man.**—"But we are not always so successful. Here is another bundle of papers that tells a different story of a merchant who was a marvelous salesman with a real *flair* for our line of business. He always overbuys but he always sells his stock. Nevertheless he does not know how to finance his undertakings, and he has finally gone in so deep, we do not see how he can possibly pull out. He had too much business for his capital. Our representative camped on his ground and got his father to invest \$3,000 in the business. But even that isn't going to work. The man must have a partner who has financial sense or else he must sell out and go in as a manager in a department in this line in another store. I rather think I shall advise him to do the latter."

Another merchant had demonstrated his ability by opening a successful store in the vicinity of a competitor whose business was declining. "All the men around here are carpenters," he explained, "and they have all gone into the shipbuilding industry." But his lively young competitor in the same district was actually doing too big a business for his capital. His creditor's admiration was aroused to such a pitch that he exhausted every device to increase the plucky merchant's capital. After his relatives had been tried and found wanting, a friend was discovered who indorsed a note for him.

**"If We Had Followed Your Advice . . . ."**—A jobber handling a line of staple goods different from the one men-

tioned above, tells a similar story in which failure resulted from a merchant's unwillingness to take his creditor's advice. These were cousins in a middle western city who became real-estate crazy. Despite their surplus of several hundred thousand dollars, they borrowed more and put the whole sum into land operations. Their capital and their energy were so tied up that we advised them, 'Get out of one business or the other.'

"At last they sent us an order for a large amount which I refused to send to our factory because I knew they wouldn't last. They did sell one piece of land at a great sacrifice to help me out and by careful work I got their accounts with us down to a few hundred before they failed. Today, though successful in another line of business, they tell us, 'We know our mistake, and wish we had taken your advice.'"

## CHAPTER 35

### PROBLEMS IN COOPERATION

**A Credit Man's Working Program.**—A working program provided by the credit manager for a merchant of limited experience is described in the story of a retailer in Arkansas, who began with \$2,500 capital saved from clerking for many years. His wife mortgaged the home given them by her father for \$1,500. A thousand dollars went into fixtures, another thousand into charge accounts, and at the end of the year the man owed \$8,000. "I can't make it go," he said despairingly to the credit man. "I'll have to take the loss of my savings of a lifetime and go back to clerking." "Don't give up," advised the credit man. "You can borrow some money and with our help persuade your creditors to give you a chance." Through a second mortgage on his home, he raised a thousand dollars and arranged with his creditors to pay back \$100 a week. An active merchandising program involving a rousing sale, strong advertising, and an increased volume of business at a lower price enabled him, to his own amazement, to repay his bank and to hand over to his creditors \$300 a week.

**Applying the Rod.**—While the constructive credit manager is willing to "go the limit" with a customer who shows a disposition to work with him, he must be equally ready to apply the penalty for unwillingness to cooperate. One of the most popular men in a small town in Minnesota took over the business of his father, who had always discounted his bills. But the popularity of the son was the undoing of the business. He relied so much on his friendships and so little on efficiency that his patrons began to buy from his competitor. The credit man remonstrated and finally sent down a personal representative, who wrote back confidential advice to hold back

all orders until the merchant promised to reform. This drastic action was thoroughly explained, with the result that the merchant according to last accounts was struggling to turn over a new leaf.

Sometimes the credit man sadly sees his own judgment vindicated in the ruin of an unruly merchant. Two partners in a western New York store after several years of moderately good business grew impatient with the rate at which their wealth was advancing and decided that their city owed them a living. Their operating expense under the influence of this new gospel crept from 18 to 28 per cent, and when the credit man came down to look things over, he found that each was drawing \$4,200 a year out of the store. "No, this won't break us," they said in explanation. "When we began doing business, we gave merchandise away, at prices that were far too low. Now we find that people know nothing about values and so we are simply getting more for our goods."

The rest of the story is that the credit man saved himself, but the experiment of the two partners in trying to pull their profits up by their boot straps kept them out of the hands of the sheriff for just two years longer.

**Constructive Advice at Time of Sale.**—Suppose you never gave a man advice with regard to credit unless he owed you money, wouldn't he begin to suspect that your interest in his prosperity had a decidedly selfish angle? So reasons the best type of credit manager, who, recognizing that collection has a permanent place in his marketing plan, makes use of inserts and special articles, not only at the time of collection but also at the time of sale.

An instance of the constructive interest of a supply house in its dealers' welfare is displayed in the following letter which warns the dealer to take his price advance at the time the market goes up. The especial pertinence of this letter is that the failure of merchants to take the action it advocates diminished their capital and forced them to ask their creditors for more time.

Dear Sir:

How a merchant can make a net profit  
on every sale and still "go broke."

An actual occurrence

A man bought a retail grocery business for \$8,000 cash. In eighteen months he had a stock of \$14,000 and owed \$6,000, and had practically the same stock with which he started.

And yet every article sold had been at a satisfactory net profit.

How did it come about?

This illustration of only one article in the stock will show.

In this stock were two cases of condensed milk for which he paid 8c a can and sold for 10c, the gross profit being 2c, the expense of 15% on selling price (expense in grocery business is less than in ours) was  $1\frac{1}{2}c$ , leaving a net profit of  $\frac{1}{2}c$  on every can.

Now if this merchant had been closing out his business he would have had his money back, his expense, and a profit, but he is continuing in business and must replace the two cases of milk.

But the price has gone up to 12c a can.

He only received 10c and has to pay 12c.

Where did he get the 2c?

Another instance:

A drygoods merchant sold his entire stock of goose feathers, for which he had paid 65c a lb., at 90c a lb., making a profit on every pound of 25c.

Now, as in the other case, if he were closing out his business he would do so profitably on this basis, but at the very time he sold his stock at 90c a lb. it would cost him \$1.35 to replace every pound.

The 45c a lb. was an absolute loss and had to be taken from accumulated capital, or had to be borrowed, or would be an indebtedness.

The answer is that unless a merchant sells an article at a price that would enable him to replace the article and have a net profit over his expenses, he is losing money.

Hundreds of merchants are doing, and have been doing, this same kind of merchandising, and will surely come out as this grocer did.

Yours very truly,

**Cooperation With Customers.**—If an efficiency department is conducted to give advice to merchants, shall it operate under the wing of the credit department or the sales department? The latter, reply some executives, because when a merchant's volume of business is low, the salesman can very reasonably get after him to help increase his efficiency and his purchases together without saying anything unpleasant about his credit situation. At the same time we may know very well that our sales to him are small because the credit department is keeping them so. The question is merely as to whether a salesman or a credit man can make the more tactful approach. Others reply that the credit department is the proper branch of the house to send out helpful suggestions or personal representatives, because in most cases what is needed is not only more energetic salesmanship but better accounting and financing, and above all, *better retail collection*. Both branches should cooperate, reply still others; and here perhaps is the true answer.

A large clothing manufacturer says he has no difficulty in obtaining cooperation between credit and sales because both functions are handled by the same executives. Their field representatives who wrestle with the retailers' problems are skilled in advertising and sales and also in credit, collection, and financing, and the "dealer helps" of this house include a well-equipped advertising service for retailers, bookkeeping forms, and the well-known booklet, "What Do You Know About Your Business?" prepared by the credit department.

From whatever angle the need of the merchant for constructive advice may appear, it is certain that the need of the seller is always the same, whether that need is felt most acutely by the sales or by the credit department. Both want to sell the merchant more and always more goods. Neither wants to sell him one penny's worth more than he can dispose of to advantage. When the credit manager turns down an order sent him by the sales department, he ought to be able to say with utter truthfulness, "This hurts me as much as it hurts you."

**The Traveling Representative.**—Suppose a merchant has put an unproductive department into one of the best positions in his store, and is crowding a potential profit-maker into an obscure corner. He ought to have an accounting system that would warn him of the high rental cost and low returns of the former, even if his imagination is not equal to grasping the possibilities of the latter. Now, how is this to show on his financial statement sent through the mails to the credit man? But the traveling representative on the ground can discover the difficulty. If he brings the money-making department into the sphere where sales are more possible, then his house sells a larger volume of goods to the merchant, who in turn makes an increased profit, and every one is benefited by the simple change.

Or suppose that the salesman is “called off” from his visit to a certain merchant because the credit limit has been reached and the payment of certain invoices is long overdue. Again the traveling representative may discover—what is almost always true in such cases—that the merchant has no system of collections worthy the name and what he needs is tactful advice on installing such a system without driving away trade.

The field representative will pay his way with a far greater number of houses than at present employ his services. Such men are, it is true, rare; rare in their expert knowledge of retail merchandising, rarer still in the tact that can avoid arousing antagonism, in the cheery energy that puts life into a despondent heart, and in the kindly sympathy that inspires confidence. Nevertheless, such men can be found. All honor to them and to their work!

The house which cannot employ a special representative for such work has still the members of its credit and sales departments who can take an occasional trip to study the needs of a case on the grounds. Moreover an enormous amount can be done through special pages in the catalog, articles in the house organ, special bulletins, folders, inserts, letters, etc.

**Illustration of a Constructive Program.**—The constructive program of the B. F. Goodrich Company is indicated in the

following excerpts from a statement made by its credit manager. Personal acquaintance is upheld as the best basis for credit, and the opportunities thus afforded for advising the dealer about his business are grasped by credit department and sales department alike. This company has districted the country, and intends "to have a credit department representative within a few hours' ride of practically all our customers." The manager looks forward to the time when "virtually no collections will be made by mail."

In those cases where it is impossible for us to have a representative call on the customer, we have tried to have all accounts closed on our books at the expiration of 90 days after the term of sale. Of course, this period varies, depending upon circumstances, but the general average will be very close to the period named. If at the end of that time our efforts are without results, the accounts are referred to attorneys for attention. This procedure will apply to a large number of accounts of comparatively small amount. We endeavor to form a personal acquaintance and influence with the customer and we are glad to be able to report that the results have been very satisfactory.

We are anxious to increase the amount of work which we have been doing in this connection. We aim to have a personal acquaintance with as many of our customers as is possible. To accomplish this we have the entire country divided into districts. In each district territory we maintain a fully equipped credit organization. At the present time we have fifteen organizations of this kind and some of them control territories comprising several states. We are now establishing in the larger territories subordinate credit departments at points which are advantageously located and these departments will operate under the supervision of the main credit department in each territory. We are doing this solely to get our credit representatives nearer to the customers with the idea of strengthening our influence due to the closer acquaintance which can be more readily formed. We hope, when conditions permit, to have a credit department representative within a few hours' travel of virtually all our customers.

The constructive work which can be done by the district credit man is one of the chief considerations. If we can gain a personal knowledge of a prospective customer or additional information regarding an old one, we are able many times to accept new business, which we would ordinarily refuse, to increase old lines of credit. Again we often, simply through our personal acquaintance, influence a customer



to discount our bills, and as the discount is usually a liberal one, it means a considerable saving to him and makes it unnecessary for us to solicit payment either in person or by correspondence. We are looking forward to the time when virtually no collections will be made by mail. In this connection, we are greatly assisted by our sales representatives who have come to realize that a past-due account defeats their sales efforts. Both the sales and credit departments are coordinating their efforts to secure the best class of customers, considered from the angle of the greatest good to the corporation.

In some instances the sales department is not always able to sell a concern whose responsibility is unquestioned and is obliged to secure orders from concerns with limited capital. In those cases we help them by an "on the ground" investigation and an acquaintance with the prospective customer. In this way *we have found it possible to accept business from many concerns whose orders would be refused if our representatives simply sat at their desks and dealt with facts as contained in the commercial agency reports.\** On the other hand, we frequently experience difficulty in adjusting an account by correspondence and are obliged to solicit the aid of the salesman who regularly calls on the concern.

The representatives in both the sales and credit departments appreciate the fact that "a dead customer pays no dividends" and as long as there is a possibility of doing a satisfactory business with a customer, we continue our efforts to make that business an actuality. We realize that there is a tremendous amount of work to do along these lines as we carry an average of 60,000 accounts on our books at all times and the conditions are constantly varying. Customers who were formerly prompt pay, are not now and *other customers whose accounts we have watched carefully have graduated from this class and are now considered among our most satisfactory accounts.\** We know that next week or next month there will be changes in a certain percentage of the accounts which are open on our books today.

We have developed our theory of personal acquaintance with customers to the point where we are satisfied that the results are going to be worth our efforts and in the end will pay high dividends.

There is literally no end to the constructive suggestions that can come from a credit manager before delinquency. For instance, a lumber company that had made up its mind to improve payments by helping its dealers to do better business,

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\* The italics are the author's.

sent out a booklet of efficiency suggestions showing among other things how to make prompt collections. The letter introducing the booklet called attention to the importance of prompt collections by builders from customers, and of equally prompt payments from the builders to the lumber company, if prices were to be kept low enough to combat mail-order houses. A similar argument was used by a jobber making a specialty of cash bargains that enabled country merchants to meet the prices of the catalog houses.

Dealer's help booklets of every kind have an opportunity to preach efficient accounting, prompt collections, quick turnovers, and prompt payments as a means of keeping prices low to the dealer and of enabling him to give low prices to his customers. Specific instances drawn from the conduct of a particular business form the best material for this purpose.

A commission merchant whose terms are necessarily short, prints a strong appeal to self-interest on the back of every statement and invoice. He points out that goods will spoil unless turned rapidly, and that the maintenance of short terms is for the benefit of his customers as well as for himself. Merchants in other lines with longer terms would probably prefer to send such an appeal as a printed insert with the statement, when payment is past due.

**The Appeal to Pride in Selling Credit.**—When customers are of good standing and business transactions are large, credit education must be conducted very delicately. A favorite method is to treat such customers as equals, and to pass on to them items of information they may find useful in establishing prompt credits and prompt collections with their own customers. This appeals strongly to pride and has no hint that the advice is intended to react directly on the man who listens to it.

Most credit education is conveyed in this fashion.

An appeal to pride of a different kind is also used by installment houses or others undertaking an extremely hazardous risk. A large credit mail-order house at the beginning of a letter of solicitation tells the customer,

I have been told that you are a thoroughly reliable person—one who takes pride in a cozy and pretty home, and frankly I am anxious to make you a customer of mine.

Other paragraphs of the letter read:

We never made any distinction about a person's occupation or earning power. There is only one thing that recommended a person to us and that was—honesty.

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Notice that we ask for no references or securities. During a half-century of business dealings with home-loving people all over America, we have learned that such folks are honest. And it is not necessary to tie up our wonderful credit plan with red tape, embarrassment, or annoyance.

**Industrial Service from Banks.**—The interest of banking houses in the efficiency of business men who have secured a line of credit, is hardly less than that of the jobber or the manufacturer. This fact is recognized by the National City Bank of New York when they insist that their loaning officers become familiar with the problem of specific industries which the bank serves. The information disclosed by the borrower's financial statement is supplemented by further data gained on personal visits at the customer's place of business. As a result the bank combines with the systematic examination of the physical and financial management of industrial concerns having credit relations with the bank a service of expert assistance in standardizing methods and accounting. The officers express the hope that the bank will, by virtue of the personal contact thus established, not only be able to appraise the true worth of such assets as personnel of officers and labor conditions in the factory, "but also by placing the emphasis on better methods of doing business, to help swell the tide of interest in scientific cost-keeping and more efficient management, regarded by keen observers as essential to our success in the worldwide economic struggle. . . . No applicant for a line of credit that is worthy of serious attention should ever . . . be refused without setting forth the real reasons, tactfully and in the most friendly spirit, and making what constructive suggestions seem pertinent."

"Who," asks one of the bank's officers, "is or should be more deeply and vitally interested in the general prosperity of industry than the banker? He wishes or should wish nothing for the individual business which is not for the highest good of that business, for what is of lasting benefit to it is to the bank's good as well. What an infinite deal can be wrought through the channels of education! Ignorance is our common foe; if we knew better we would do better. . . . Cooperation in the interchange of knowledge and ideas is an absolute essential to progress, and the individual, whatever his station in life, who shuts himself off from his fellows, who assumes that he knows all there is to know, or at least all that is worth knowing about his specialty, is standing in his own light. He not only robs himself but all society, and his loss is in proportion to his responsibility."

**"How We Can Help You."**—The First National Bank of Utica, New York, issued under this title a booklet which explains its ability to give service of unusual type to its patrons. In a section emphasizing the importance of efficient bookkeeping, it freely places at the disposal of its customers the service of its bookkeeping experts. In eliminating waste in office routine, the bank offers the benefit of its own experience.

Many a bank today is taking stock of its ability to serve its customers in ways that will increase their efficiency and prosperity and that will help the bank grow at the same time. These are but other illustrations of the kind of credit work that is not only preventive but constructive; that builds goodwill and establishes a confidence that is of untold value when difficulties arise.

**A Diploma from the School of Hard Knocks.**—Somewhere in the Middle West there is a retail merchant who prizes highly a letter written him by his largest creditor, at the end of a severe struggle covering a year and a half. It is reproduced here, not only because of its fine expression of appreciation, but because it shows that the end of a piece of constructive credit work is only the beginning of a vigilant program of efficiency.

Dear Sir:

You have again proved yourself to be a man of great patience and good courage.

In February, when you disclosed the status of your business to us, we did not think you had much more than a fighting chance. Some of the other creditors with whom we communicated at the time were very strongly of the opinion that you had no chance at all.

Consequently, it is a matter of pride to us to be able to mail a general letter to creditors, calling their attention to the successful result of your effort. We congratulate you and wish to express our admiration for your pluck and judgment.

It is a rare thing for us to make suggestions to other creditors in affairs of this kind. In a period of ten years, we do not recall that we have done it more than twice. Having known you for a long time and having faith in your power to straighten things out, we took it up in this case.

When your sales fell off immediately after the extension was arranged and it proved so difficult to reduce expenses, we confess that we had some serious doubts about you, but you met the double difficulty without any tremors and did nobly in overcoming the unexpected obstacles.

While your merchandise creditors are entitled to your thanks, one source of assistance which enabled you to carry your business on and to re-establish your merchandise credit was the staunch support of your bank, which not only showed its confidence in you, but evidenced its desire to sustain local enterprise.

Having gone through this experience, you ought to be able now to handle your business in such a way that the pitfalls can be avoided; you are stronger in experience and in judgment as a result of the effort of the last year and a half.

We hope you will not feel that the battle is wholly won; you still have some current merchandise bills and the bank indebtedness. Your expense is high in proportion to your volume, so you must be careful.

For your sake, we trust that an improvement in conditions will enable you to increase your volume of sales and we advise you earnestly to continue to hold down your expense so that you can make some profits with which to increase your capital and thus gradually work into the zone of safety.

In accordance with your recent request, we are enclosing a statement showing a balance due of \$.....

While it is customary under extensions to charge interest for over-time, we have waived the charge in this instance as a slight evidence of our appreciation of your efforts.

**Cooperation at a Price.**—The discussion in this and the preceding chapter, and the letters at the end of Chapter 33, have had to do with business service as a gift from the manufacturer or wholesaler to his retailer-customer. There is, however, another form of applying business service—on the basis of cost, or cost plus a slight margin of profit for the supplier.

An outstanding example of this method is found in the plan operated by the General Distributing Corporation of Saginaw, Michigan, under the direction of the Corporation's credit manager, C. H. Brace. The G. D. C. catalog carries an announcement of the fact that the Corporation maintains a Business Aid Department, whose purpose is to lend assistance to dealers in any form necessary to the development of their business. This department furnishes dealers with collection or accounting systems at low cost; helps them make bank connections; and suggests advertising and merchandising methods.

The feature of the G. D. C. plan which has excited the keenest interest of credit managers is the collection system. To dealers who are in arrears, the Corporation sends the following:

Dear Sir:

We believe that we are in a position to help you materially reduce, perhaps wipe out entirely, the amount of your account with us.

Our faith in your ability as a business man persuaded us to extend credit accommodation to you. We believe that the present condition of your account with us is due largely to the fact that you have had difficulty in making your own collections. We assume this must be true because we cannot believe that you would willingly jeopardize your credit rating if you had the money to pay.

If this is true we want to help you. We have a method that will collect your slow accounts for you. You pay no commissions. You do not have to go through any slow or costly legal procedure. All of the money collected under this method is paid directly to you.

We are offering this service to you because we are really interested in your success. This service will not only enable you to clean up your account with us but it will also put some good hard cash into the profit column of your business.

We feel confident that you will welcome the help we are offering through this system because it will get the money for you.

Just sign the enclosed card and mail it (no stamp necessary) and we shall be glad to explain the system to you.

Very truly yours,

About 50 per cent of the dealers to whom the above letter is sent respond by paying something on account and mailing the reply card, which reads as follows:

Gentlemen:

I should like to know all about your service that will help me collect my accounts without having to pay any commissions or going through costly legal procedure.

The Corporation then reveals the details of the collection plan in this letter:

Dear Sir:

We were glad to get your request for additional information about the service we mentioned for collecting your slow accounts.

Purely as a matter of business we can afford to do more for a customer who is careful of his own collections than we can for one who is not careful about this very important end of his business. In a recent survey made by the U. S. Government the startling fact was revealed that the greatest cause of retail failures was not inexperience, poor buying, poor salesmanship, chain store or mail-order competition but a weak credit system, coupled with inefficient collection methods.

Our service has been developed to offer you the same efficient type of collection method that is used by the large corporations with their well-organized credit departments. It is through the development of this service that a sure, safe, and inexpensive method of handling collections has been opened to retailers. We say sure because it has demonstrated that it gets the money; safe because it does the job without losing goodwill and without recourse to legal entanglements; and inexpensive because all you pay for a subscription to the service is \$14.85. You do not pay a single penny in commissions on the money collected.

In spite of the fact that the service is very simple we do not believe that its essential points can be properly presented by letter. So we are having our regular salesman call on you to show you exactly how it operates.

We shall look forward to entering your name as one of our subscribers to this unusual service.

Very truly yours,

The above letter is promptly followed up by the salesman's call. He explains that the system comprises 300 letters and a follow-up service reminding the dealer of the mailing dates of

the various pieces. The Corporation maintains touch with the dealer until the entire series has been used up. The salesman represents the service as equivalent to sending an experienced collector to fifty delinquent customers every week for six weeks, at a very low cost. If the sales talk proves effective, the salesman takes the order for the collection letter series just as he would an order for merchandise.

The cost to the Corporation is about \$10 a set for the letters. It thus makes a profit of about \$5 on each sale, but the results in the collection of past-dues from merchants who buy the series are, of course, far more important to the Corporation than the modest profit made on the sale of the service.



## CHAPTER 36

### APPEALS TO GOOD CUSTOMERS

**The Value of Habit.**—The collection man who employs a good system, and who follows up accounts promptly and regularly, never allowing interference with routine, avails himself of the power of habit in the customer by securing action always at a fixed time, and by building up a custom of payment which is hard to break, until it becomes more natural to take the action than to omit it.

The purpose of reminders should be to reinforce this power of habit by suggesting that the account has been overlooked, that some subordinate has failed in his routine. "The book-keeper in the press of work has omitted to send your customary check," or some similar phrase suggests the re-establishment of the usual habit.

For the same reason it is not advisable, unless terms are very urgent indeed, to pay marked attention to early delinquency. To do so gets the debtor to thinking about it, and raises the issue in his mind, "Shall I pay this bill, or shall I postpone payment?" If the question is not raised, the bill is more likely to be paid than not.

**Making Action Automatic.**—Habit is one of the most potent factors in our lives, and it is all-important to the collection man. The sooner he can get his account transferred in the debtor's mind from the list of those things which require special thought and consideration to the list of those things which are done automatically, the better for him. Ideally, therefore, all his collection methods should be designed to establish right habits of payment in his customers and to maintain them.

For this reason it is a good thing to show surprise when the payment is so far overdue as to require serious attention,

because this suggests strongly that the normal course of things be resumed. Shall the credit man take this lapse from good habits seriously, or with a spice of humorous annoyance, like the credit man who wrote "There seems to be a monkey-wrench in the gear box somewhere. Will you take it out by sending your usual prompt check, and letting the machinery run on as usual, with satisfaction to all concerned?" This is a question which different men will answer in different ways.

**Creating Bad Habits.**—Bad habits may be started if the creditor allows a bonus or special discount for prompt payment. Instalment houses handling small accounts by mail sometimes use this method to clean up an account and get rid of a risky customer. A stereotyped series of statements, letters, or drafts gets the customer into the habit of waiting for severe action.

**Obtaining Payment or Explanation.**—The object of every step in collection is to obtain either a payment or an explanation letting you know just what to expect; that is, making a definite arrangement for settlement. Specific action is looked for from each letter or statement, and consequently a specific request should be made as clearly as possible at the end of the letter. This action may be mentioned elsewhere in the letter, for instance, at the beginning; but in nearly all cases it should also come at the end. Specific language picturing the action taken helps the reader to "see himself doing it," and aids his imagination. "Don't bother to write a letter; just put your check in this envelope and send it back before you forget it," or "Wrap a bill in this letter," or "Use the enclosed coin card—that makes it easy to pay this small account"—such suggestions are especially useful in collecting petty accounts.

Requests for explanation or reply can be accompanied by the suggestion, "Just write it on the bottom of this sheet," or "the back of this sheet." Some firms with a great volume of small accounts use multigraphed letters with questions, etc., in a space at the bottom of the sheet, followed by dotted lines for the answer.

**"Letting Him Down Easy."**—All assumptions favorable to the customer and providing a courteous reason why he probably has not made payment are "action-getters," because rather than make uncomfortable explanations the delinquent will postpone payment still further. But when relieved from that unpleasant necessity, he is far more likely to pay. All suggestions of leniency following on veiled threats are means of inducing action, because they suggest, "Repent while there is time, lest a worse thing befall you." In general, every specific appeal discussed in this chapter has for its primary purpose the securing of action, by providing an incentive strong enough to overcome the reasons for further delay. It must not be thought that they are mere courteous expedients adopted in the fear of giving offense. It is true they should be so used as constantly to resell the customer, and to make for better and more profitable relations; but they are always chosen to secure the promptest and most satisfactory action from the individual addressed.

Finally, it is often necessary to allow part payments or an extension of time in order to make action possible for a debtor who would find it quite impossible to pay the entire account at once.

**Suggest Action by a Story.**—If a story or news item is to be used, try to put into it what salesmen know as "action suggestion." That is, let it show some one performing an action similar to the one the writer wishes the reader to take. The story of how some one made a payment and the check passed from hand to hand paying other bills, until at last it came back to the man from whom it started, not only resells the principle of credit, but gives a picture of some one paying a bill, and suggests, "Go and do thou likewise." The story of how "Pay-Up Week" succeeded in some town, presents a similar picture.

**Maintaining Respect.**—The basis of all sense of obligation is respect for one's self and for the person to whom the obligation is due. A creditor who forfeits his customer's respect has in most cases totally destroyed his customer's sense of obligation, because a delinquent debtor is unlikely to pay his bills from a sense of self-respect alone. This respect,

moreover, is founded on a wholesome fear of the creditor's strength, and if respect is gone, fear will go with it, threats will be of little use, and the creditor will be driven to use the harsh methods which may get the money but which destroy goodwill. This is the great argument against using dull and mechanical collection letters which carry a poor impression of the creditor's ability. Cheap "stunts," funny stories, bonuses for prompt payment, or violent language and bluster, destroy respect and make the debtor feel, "There's no need to pay attention to what those fellows write you." Then in order to show that he means business, the creditor will be obliged to resort to suit.

With the destruction of respect, comes contempt, which postpones action.

**Loss of Respect Means Loss of Trade.**—Even more important than any of the foregoing reasons for maintaining respect is the one that all good credit men are fond of insisting upon, namely, that a customer who has lost respect for a house will not wish to trade with it further. The loss of future orders is even more serious than the loss of the present account.

Businesslike methods, efficient system, promptness and regularity in collections, definite advance from stage to stage of the proceedings, engender respect. Unhesitating insistence on the creditor's rights and willingness to proceed to suit, or to hunt a rascal over the face of a continent without regard to expense, for the sake of making an example to wrongdoers, is absolutely necessary if a house is to maintain the respect of a certain class of unscrupulous customers. It is this reason which makes it worth while sometimes to spend many times the amount at issue in securing a judgment from a debtor.

Restraint in language, courtesy, understatement rather than overstatement, guarded language when referring to harsh steps that may be taken in the future,—all these are indicative of strength rather than weakness, and produce respect.

**Showing Fairness.**—The creditor who is not fair arouses resentment and anger, emotions which postpone payment in-

stead of securing it. Unfairness is likely to destroy the legal strength of the creditor's position. If there is a mistake in the statement of account or if the goods can be proved unsatisfactory or not up to sample, the account cannot be collected. Accordingly the first collection letter either should ask whether there is any mistake or misunderstanding, or should say:

Inasmuch as we have not heard from you in response to either of the statements sent you, we assume that there is no misunderstanding or discrepancy, and that this omission of your customary payment is merely an oversight, which you will remedy by sending us a check on receipt of this letter.

A distinction is drawn in this chapter between showing fairness on the part of the creditor, and appealing to the sense of fairness or fair play in the debtor. The first should be shown throughout the entire collection procedure; the second is a special appeal which will be taken up in due course.

Later in the series the collection man can, with good effect, claim credit for the fairness he has shown, thus appealing to shame. If he says, "It is our belief that we have been very patient with you," he awakens fear; while if he goes further and says, "We must tell you frankly that our patience is pretty nearly exhausted," the appeal to fear is still stronger.

**Aiding to Restore a Rating.**—"I impress my fairness and goodwill on my customers," says a credit manager of widely-known constructive policies, "by writing to them if I see that their ratings in Dun's or Bradstreet's have been reduced. I ask them if they know the basis for the action, and offer every legitimate help toward getting their standing restored. It is possible that an injustice has been done, and then my aid is appreciated. On the other hand, if the reduction is justified, I have a splendid chance to give constructive suggestions as to business policies that will restore them to their former standing."

**"Help Us Protect Your Standing."**—What would you do if you received a letter from your creditor, saying,

We have received a letter from (naming some outside agency or some other house) which indicates that your name is being made the subject of inquiry from the trade, and it occurs to us that in fairness to you we should write and suggest the payment of the pending invoices now considerably overdue in order that we may be able to make a satisfactory reply.

This shows the creditor's fairness and awakens a sense of gratitude. Such a letter is regularly used by one credit manager before turning the account over to an outside agency for collection. At the time he sends the letter, he instructs the agency in question to make inquiries regarding the delinquent, so that whether or not his letter meets with response, his inquiries will be of service in regard to further steps he may take.

**Obligation and Advantage.**—The customer *must* pay—it is also to his advantage to pay. Which reason will get the money quicker? The collection man who believes in resale argues that more flies are caught with sugar than with vinegar, and while he keeps the debtor's obligation in his mind, he impresses on him from every angle advantages to be secured by prompt payment. All the appeals in this chapter, except those to shame and fear, are made to the desire to secure some advantage. As the diagram on page 112 shows, obligation is felt at first only as a moral duty—a personal feeling—later in its full force as an obligation assumed under contract, and finally passes into fear of consequences. Advantages to be secured by payment become fewer as delinquency grows, until the only one left is self-preservation, the escape with a whole skin.

The diagram should be kept in mind when planning letters, at different stages of the procedure, based on the appeals here discussed.

**The Appeal to Pride.**—The appeal to pride is, next to resale (the appeal to self-interest), the most useful of all that can be employed in collections. It may be used in an indefinite number of ways. All resale arguments, whether applied to credit or merchandise; all offers of leniency, especially when they come from a responsible official of the house; expressions of pleasure regarding the business relations between the creditor

and the customer, can be made to appeal strongly to pride. The appeal may be made at any stage in the collection procedure, from the first interview in which the credit man "sells credit" down to the time when the creditor has instituted suit, and makes a last appeal to pride in order to prevent final action being taken. All appeals to the debtor's self-interest can be made to awaken pride. Sometimes the appeal to self-interest goes hand in hand with fear rather than with pride, when the only advantage which his payment will secure is the saving of his skin; but even at the last stage of operations it can be suggested that payment will not only save the cost and disgrace of court proceedings, but will reinstate the debtor in the good opinion of the creditor—which appeals to his pride.

If, however, the appeal to pride is overdone, and becomes flattery, it arouses contempt, and defeats its own ends.

**Phrases That Appeal to Pride.**—A courteous, respectful tone in collection letters appeals to pride by showing that though payment is overdue the firm still desires to maintain friendly relations.

Doubtless this is an oversight.

---

Your statement has been overlooked during this busy season.

---

Such oversight happens sometimes with the best of customers.

---

Don't bother to explain, we know how it happens ourselves.

—these phrases show confidence in the customer's good intentions. A request that he send in an order with his check, a paragraph of sales material in the letter, or such a sentence as,

The sales manager of your territory, Mr. Johnson, tells me it's about time he had an order from you.

or an envelope insert from the sales department; all these are selling devices showing desire for the customer's trade and appealing to his pride.

References to "our good customers"—"the high class of our trade"—"We take pride in the people we do business with"—"our good friends"—these awaken pride. Appeals made "as one business man talking to another" call forth pride by putting customer and seller on an equal footing, and show frankness as well. The expressed desire to "re-establish cordial relations" arouses pride as well as self-interest.

Still appealing to pride, but with more emphasis, is the statement,

We do not for one moment suppose that this reflects the methods of your office, but we do not doubt some subordinate has been failing to give this matter proper attention. We should like to see it brought to the notice of the proper official of the house.

An anecdote can be told showing how such an occurrence happened to some other house in the writer's experience.

**Urging the Discount.**—When urging a merchant to discount his bills, the explanation of the opportunity should be made in such a way as to appeal not only to self-interest through the savings instinct, but also to pride. A merchant should never feel that he is being "ridden" for not discounting. "Our patrons find that they can afford to borrow at the bank in order to secure our discount," is a statement that can be followed by detailed explanation of just why this is possible. "We feel that we may rely upon you now to help us maintain your standard of payment on your account," is useful in instalment letters, but it may be adapted to any purpose. "Our past relations have inspired confidence in your integrity and ability to pay," contains just a suggestion that the opposite of integrity may exist. All reference to past cordial relations and to the good business transacted in itself arouses pride, as does also a reference to "your usual promptness."

**Asking for His Own Judgment.**—A good effect is produced at the end of a letter by the phrase, "You may be sure your courtesy will be appreciated," or by the signature, "Respectfully yours." To refer the matter to the debtor's own judgment, as, "You will doubtless agree with us that our terms



are unusually liberal," or "that the payment is considerably overdue and should now be made without delay," not only shows fairness but is so courteous as to awaken pride.

It is our belief that you are just as anxious to clear up any past-due items as we are to have them balanced.

---

You would not think well of our business methods if we allowed you to forget the account.

---

You value a clean record; we prize your goodwill.

—are sentences which awaken pride by showing deference for the customer's opinion.

We do not care to think that your failure to pay is intentional.

contains a sting, but still shows esteem.

The customer's pride in his own business dealings can be referred to effectively.

You run your affairs efficiently—

---

You maintain a standard of prompt collections—

—are very useful forms of this appeal.

**Local Pride.**—Local pride or sectional pride can be used to advantage. "We have heard a good deal about the way they run things in Detroit," wrote one manager, "and we don't believe they got this reputation by overlooking settlement of their invoices." East and West, North and South, each can use semi-humorous reference to the other's enviable record. Sometimes financial conditions affect a wide section, making payments difficult, and the pluck and pride of the whole district can be encouraged in correspondence from the credit man.

**Granting Extensions.**—When granting part payment or an extension of time in most cases a strong appeal to pride

should be made in order to bolster up the customer's sense of obligation. The credit man can say,

We take great pleasure in granting the favor you ask, because we are well assured that you are worthy of the confidence.

or,

It is a pleasure to find ourselves in the position to do as you request and to feel that this is no more than the due of one with whom our past dealings have been so unusually pleasant.

The same is true when an extension of time is granted. To accede grudgingly to a favor robs it of the goodwill element and the recipient feels much less sense of obligation.

**Showing Confidence.**—In serious collection correspondence after the delinquency has passed the "reminder" stage, such phrases as, "We wish to take up with you frankly"—"a frank attitude"—"It occurred to us you would respond to a straight-from-the-shoulder request for payment"—imply that the creditor has a high opinion of the debtor. "When we shipped our goods, we expressed our confidence in you," reminds the debtor of the good opinion he is in danger of forfeiting. If the letter goes on to express disappointment, it appeals to shame as well, while if it contains a courteous, deferential explanation of the basis for credit, it appeals still more strongly to pride. All resale of credit principles, such as explanation for the need of prompt settlement of account, is, as has been said before, an appeal to pride, by showing confidence in the customer's willingness to take the right action when once he understands the matter rightly.

**"Get On Your Feet Again."**—"Pay this old account and clean off the slate; then you can get a new start," is an appeal much used by instalment collectors which holds out the hope of reinstatement in the creditor's good esteem. A similar statement is, "No greater asset to a business man exists than the proved ability to overcome handicaps and live up to the arrangement he has made." This idea is used with splendid effect by a certain jobber in dealing with discouraged mer-

chants, and some application of it can be made to almost every kind of business. Indeed, all the work of constructive credit should be so conducted as to appeal to pride with no suggestion of shame. Likewise, such cooperative collection methods as "Pay-Up Week" and "Nimble-Dollar Day" which involve the resale of the credit principle and have besides a strong element of good-natured rivalry, should always be so managed that it is a badge of honor to pay one's bills rather than a mark of shame to be found out as one who has not paid.

The frank statement that confidence is being undermined by the debtor's action,

Conditions have actually reached the point where we are losing confidence, and that is something we do not want to happen.

helps the debtor to realize the worth of the asset he is throwing away. Appreciation of the customer's efforts, of payments or promises he has made, or good intentions expressed, appeals to his pride by recognizing his honest purpose.

Even the man who abuses the discount privilege can be appealed to through the sense of pride, although an endeavor to shame him out of his practice is a natural appeal to choose.

We take pride in our customers and are loath to believe that one of them would intentionally take what did not belong to him. Consequently we prefer to believe that some subordinate has been following this practice.

are sentences from a letter on this subject, calculated to awaken whatever pride a house may have.

**Courtesy Awakens Pride.**—Above all else, it is the courteous and considerate attitude taken in collection letters or in credit correspondence which makes the customer feel that he is being treated as an honorable citizen and a good business man. It appeals to his moral sense as strongly as would a direct accusation of wrong-doing, and it has the advantage of not arousing his anger and opposition. It retains and builds goodwill. Finally, the appeal to pride is based on the unfortunate fact that in America carelessness in payment and even failure to respond to collection letters are often characteristic of men

who in other respects are strictly honorable and would not tolerate a slight upon their integrity. The appeal to their pride simply reminds them that to classify themselves as "slow-pay" does not accord with their high standing in other particulars. The appeal to pride goes hand in hand with the appeal to self-interest. It is part of the campaign of education to show merchants the meaning and value of the credit system.

**Appeals to Goodwill.**—The house can rely on the goodwill of its customers to help it out in a tight place, and under ordinary conditions it can appeal to the same feeling to aid it in maintaining a businesslike promptness. Many houses use the phrase, "We rely on the goodwill of our customers to repair these little oversights on being reminded of them," suggesting both goodwill and pride. "The largest percentage of our friends who do not discount pay on receipt of the statement," makes use of the word "friends" to suggest goodwill.

**An Urgent Need.**—Suppose a house suddenly finds itself hard pressed for money. Calls are coming in from every quarter. Unforeseen difficulties have been met with. The usual sources of relief are, for one reason or another, blocked. Under such circumstances an executive who sits down and writes a frank statement of the case to his customers who owe him money, and appeals to them on the score of their goodwill established through many years of pleasant dealings, is likely to receive a generous response. The letter should carefully avoid all suggestion that the writer is "on the rocks," for if his customers get the impression that he is going to fail, anyway, some of them may be selfish enough to hold off a little longer. The appeal to pity seldom succeeds. Goodwill must in this case be combined with the sense of self-advantage, making the man's customers feel that by helping him to get on his feet again they will have the benefit of more good business with him in the future.

In the same way a retailer can say to a customer that he has a heavy bill to meet—will his friend help him out with something on account?

**Avoid "Poor Mouth."**—All suggestion of "poor mouth," implying that the money is desperately needed, should be carefully excluded from collection letters because most readers will not believe it, and they will not wish to continue trading with such a weak house. No excuses or apologies should ever be offered, but the real reason underlying collections, the constant need of payment to maintain the credit system, can be unhesitatingly set forth.

**"Cooperation" a Magic Word.**—The word "cooperation" is full of magic today, thanks to the gradual acceptance by the business world of the fact that the old day of cut-throat competition is gone for good, and that men are more advantaged by standing shoulder to shoulder—as they should in a democracy. A request for cooperation can be used in any letter; it is a fine substitute for the cry, "We need the money," being at once more dignified and better founded on fact. It reminds the delinquent of the nature of the credit system, which without cooperation could not exist a day. A longer letter "selling the idea" of cooperation, or a printed insert sent with a statement, will help to plant the thought in a customer's mind.

We rely on your cooperation in keeping your account within the limit agreed upon.

shows one use of this appeal.

## CHAPTER 37

### APPEALS TO THICK-SKINNED CUSTOMERS

**Varying the Appeal.**—All the foregoing appeals are based on the assumption that the customer has a strong sense of honor and pride, and is able to understand the nature of the credit obligation. They produce a powerful effect on a different class of customers when combined with other appeals, as we shall see. The following appeals to good nature, fair play, the desire to avoid annoyance, the sense of shame, and the sense of fear, may be used from the beginning with the thick-skinned or slow-paying customer or in dealing with any type of customer who, through his failure to respond to other kinds of letters has classified himself as poor-pay.

**Appeal to Good Nature.**—A great many men will respond quickly to a tone of good nature used at a time when the creditor has every right to use severe methods. "Oh, well, what's the use of getting angry about this?" the creditor seems to say. "You are probably a pretty good fellow and I have confidence that you will pay."

The great success of letters with a good-natured anecdote or a little humorous dialogue is due to the fact that there are many stubborn people in the world, who like to show that they are "as good as the next man" by not responding promptly to their obligations. There is no use in being angry with these so-called "independent" people, and a good-natured attitude can be adopted even when sending a draft or giving notice of an attorney's call. One house wrote to a customer of this kind,

Having had no reply to our letter we have today turned our account over to Blank and Blank, attorneys of your city, with instructions to begin court proceedings immediately. We take it that in so doing we are proceeding in accordance with your own wishes, and that this way of settlement, while not the one we should choose, is based on your preferences.

Very truly yours,

This letter tickled the customer's sense of humor so much that he sent in his check by return mail and has since kept up his business with this house.

The "crying-face" stamp or paster on the statement, and the "smiling face" on the receipted bill do not represent a very high grade of humor, but in many cases they seem to "get the money."

The policy of the house demands that we follow up these matters, but we should much rather put our efforts into giving you and the rest of our customers better goods or service.

is a good-natured way of reminding the delinquent that he is not advantaging himself by the refusal.

**Appeal to Fair Play.**—The appeal to the justness of the customer or to his sense of fair play is based on a strong and fine instinct. The general acceptance of Roosevelt's phrase, "a square deal," shows that this feeling is powerfully rooted in us all. It implies just a little bit of resentment, and shows that the man who is making the appeal is ready to fight for his rights, but it shows also his belief that the other fellow is a "good sport" and means to do the right thing. The thick-skinned or careless delinquent who is really able to pay will be roused by this appeal without feeling offense.

Put yourself in our place—how would you feel if we were withholding a payment that you knew yourself entitled to?

illustrates this appeal.

Some of the most successful phrases appealing to fair play are:

Will you do your part?

—

I must follow my established rule—

—

I cannot make an exception in your case.

—

We are willing to allow for exceptional instances, but how can we unless we know the circumstances?

The method of asking the debtor to classify himself, like other appeals to his own judgment, shows fairness.

A reference to past leniency can be coupled with the appeal for fair play by showing that the creditor deserves a reply.

It may be you are tempted to feel that because the house of Jones and Company is large and this account is small, we can be asked to wait. This is not quite fair to us, because the aggregate of the small bills is a large sum; nor really a square deal to our other customers who pay promptly.

Such a letter can continue by appealing to the customer's sense of what constitutes good business standards.

### **"Meet Us Half-Way."—**

You will agree that we have been very fair up to date. Now won't you meet us half-way by sending us in the return mail your check for goods shown on the accompanying statement?

is a good way to write to delinquents. Retail customers frequently discontinue trading with a merchant to whom they are heavily indebted. He can say to them either in person or by letter,

By the way, you are buying goods somewhere—why not from me? Does not the fair treatment you have received entitle me to your continued patronage?

A resale of the value of the merchant's goods and services can follow this, while a suggestion that his past trade was appreciated appeals to his pride and helps to remove the sting caused by the implication that he has been unfair.

The question,

Is there any reason why you are unable to meet the bill which is now overdue?

shows the creditor's fairness and makes the debtor feel like playing fair as well. The collection manager of an instalment house gives this sentence:

Please realize that it is not only expensive to be compelled to write every so often on such a small matter as this, but it really grieves us that our efforts to adjust have apparently met with so little sympathy and cooperation.



Part of the same idea is found in the sentence,

It is not exactly square to ask us to add the expense of correspondence and postage, to say nothing of the labor of handling the accounts in the office, to the legitimate cost on which the price of our goods is based.

A more general form of the same appeal can be used with good effect :

Is it fair to ask us, or any other merchant, to add the heavy cost of correspondence and office labor in following up overdue accounts, to the already high prices which we are obliged to pay to those from whom we buy? We confidently rely upon you to cooperate with us and help us to avoid further advance in our prices to you, by payment of invoices promptly as they become due.

**Offering "Constructive Credits."**—Working to secure a reply and a basis for agreement, the constructive credit manager can offer to help the delinquent to collect his own accounts or to send down a skilled representative who can give advice. Nothing can be more fair than this and it arouses the customer's sense of fair play.

We want to be fair to you, and in return, we are sure you desire to be fair with us.

One very successful collector who does a large business in retail accounts in a middle western city writes a letter full of vigorous questions :

Is the account in dispute? Where is the misunderstanding?

offering to be the mediator between creditor and debtor. In a later letter he carries this suggestion further by referring to the well-known standing of both parties, which shows his own fairness and appeals to pride. In another letter which bristles with pointed though courteous questions, he offers to help the delinquent collect any money that may be owing to him, promising him success, and offering as evidence the ability shown in the present letter. Such appeals, like all appeals to fair play, can readily be followed by appeals to fear in case the former meet with no response.

**The "General Manager" Letter.**—A method used with the greatest success is to refer the account to some higher official, who from his position of superior power grants a stay of proceedings while he makes one last appeal to the customer's pride and respect for fair play. This letter, known variously as the "general manager letter," the "vice-president's letter," or the "controller's letter," makes no attempt to terrify the delinquent, though it clearly states that further action will be taken if he does not respond immediately. Its tone is unmistakably friendly. Resale arguments of every kind can be used in this sort of letter.

**Putting It Up to Him.**—Another strong letter works for a reply by putting the matter squarely up to the customer.

If you feel that our action has been, perhaps, not entirely reasonable, we shall be very glad to have you write us frankly and fully regarding your feeling in the matter.

---

We have done our best to prevent cause for friction by carrying the account till now. You do not expect us to keep this up. The next move should be made by you.

is a statement to be used just before resorting to outside collection means, while the sentence,

We trust to your sense of fairness to set this matter right.

can be used in a reminder letter following the statement.

**"A Square Deal"—"Classify Yourself."**—A letter from an instalment house to a seriously overdue customer contains the sentence,

If you believe in a square deal, show it by paying this account in a straightforward man-fashion.

A sentence with less sting in it runs as follows:

Please return this letter with your remittance and we will know that you are another American who believes in a square deal.

The "alternative method," or "classify yourself method," can be coupled with the fair-play appeal, as follows:

Are we unfair in judging from the lack of response to our letters that you are putting yourself in a not very pleasant classification?

---

Our experience has been that there are two classes of business men who neglect their obligations—those who are careless but well-intentioned, and those who are deliberately withholding payment. In which class are you?

is a paragraph used in a collection agency letter when the customer's goodwill is no longer desired.

A paragraph that can be used under more favorable circumstances is:

There are unquestionably two classes of men who allow their accounts to drag—those who are thoroughly honorable and intend to pay but are habitually slow or are forced by circumstances to delay payment, and those who are deliberately careless. We wish to say to you with the utmost fairness that we do not for one moment believe that you intend to classify yourself as belonging to the latter.

---

If you and I could get together we could soon straighten out the misunderstanding in regard to your account, because I am sure that you intend to give us fair play.

is a sentence used in handling distant accounts. The suggestion that the delinquent should take a certain action "in justice to yourself" shows a fairness that calls for a return of the same quality. It is a good plan to explain the fairness of the creditor's terms. This appeal is useful also in writing to customers who have been guilty of abusing the discount privilege.

**Unwillingness to Take Severe Action.**—Finally, the creditor's expressed unwillingness to take unpleasant action appeals to the sense of fair play.

Please do not expect me to turn over your account to an outside collector who will not have the same interest in retaining your goodwill that I have personally.

---

Please do not force me to continue annoying you with correspondence on this bill.

We do not enjoy sending out collection letters; we prefer to rely on our customers' sense of fair play.

---

Harsh collection methods are always a last resort with me.

---

I gladly opened this account with you thinking it would be a service and accommodation to you.

—all of these appeal to the sense of fair play but show that the debtor will be injuring himself by further resistance.

**The Desire to Avoid Annoyance.**—No one enjoys being bothered with collection letters, and the annoyance of a “dun” is one of the strongest influences in getting a debtor to pay. A collector, for instance, is more a source of annoyance than of fear. Sometimes a collector tries to play on this feeling by loud talking or calling at inconvenient times, or even trying to shame the debtor by attracting the attention of outsiders. But a collector can usually find a better means of securing payment, especially as the means just referred to are likely to arouse anger, together with all the stubbornness the debtor can feel.

Get this off your mind by slipping a check into the enclosed stamped and self-addressed envelope.

is an appeal to the desire to avoid annoyance.

You do not wish to be annoyed—

---

We do not wish to annoy you—

are different ways of saying the same thing.

Please pay this small balance at once and avoid the annoyance of unnecessary correspondence.

---

Our letters must be annoying to you, but they are the only means we can employ to keep you reminded of the condition of your account.

are other ways of phrasing the same idea.

An interesting appeal is one which suggests that,

Prompt payment now will avoid the possibility of confusion later on.

This phrase attracts attention by its novelty. It reminds the debtor that it is easier to credit a payment properly if it is received on time, and that if he lets it go he may forget whether he has paid it or not, causing confusion and annoyance. The word "confusion," also, is a welcome addition to the vocabulary of collectors, which tends to become somewhat threadbare. It carries with it somewhat vague and uncomfortable suggestions of all kinds of trouble.

A past-due account breeds friction—we do not want any friction between our good customers and ourselves.

carries also a suggestion of pride.

**The Appeal to Shame.**—If most men are honest, then most men can be made to feel ashamed of their action should they fail to pay their bills when due. But how can the sense of shame be brought to bear? The inexperienced collection man will make his customers angry by insulting them, where the experienced executive will produce the desired result by his courtesy and fairness, the restraint of his language, and the sincere interest he shows in his customers' welfare. Only by behaving better than your opponent can you make him feel ashamed of himself.

A summary of former collection letters, with the dates of letters, etc., can be used to make the debtor ashamed.

We find that we sent you statements on May 1 and May 15, followed by letters on May 25 and June 2. To none of these have we had a reply. We believe we have shown our desire to deal fairly with you in this matter, and unless we hear from you on receipt of this letter we shall draw through your local bank.

**Phrases that Awaken Shame.**—Various phrases that awaken the sense of shame are the following:

This small balance for goods purchased last year—

---

Most of our customers are scrupulously careful about their obligations, and we believe you feel the same way in spite of your apparent neglect of our various communications.

---

It is so easy for you to write a letter that the least we can expect is an explanation.

---

Your letter of January 15 assured us that we should have a substantial payment by the end of the week. It is now the 25th and we have not heard from you.

---

We must express our disappointment at the fact that no reply has been received to what we considered an unusually fair offer to make it possible for you to settle your pending obligation and to allow the goods now ordered to go forward.

---

I do not want you to feel that we are in any way treating you unfairly in asking you to reply promptly to our letters.

---

What would you think of a man who received merchandise and failed to pay for it?

(This may be given in some detail. It is the famous "Thou-art-the-man" story, based on Nathan's exposure of David's wrong-doing as narrated in II Samuel 12. It is a dramatic device with the advantage of suspense, awakening curiosity.)

Please do not postpone longer a definite reply.

---

When you ordered goods from us you accepted a credit obligation.

---

We have endeavored to cooperate with you, but apparently without success.

---

Please let us know why you are withholding payment.

Payment has been repeatedly requested—

---

Please pay this small balance at once—it is not really worth while spending so much effort upon.

---

You realize surely that with a large volume of small accounts prompt payment is absolutely essential, and we trust you will not further withhold payment from us.

---

We cannot forbear from saying that it seems to us our past leniency (past satisfactory relations, etc.) entitles us at least to an answer to our various communications.

### Shame and Family Affection.—

The only explanation which I can find for your action is that it would be impossible for you to make payment at the present time without causing yourself or those dear to you great suffering. Is that correct?

(Used by a successful retailer with remarkable effect. By seeming to condone with the customer in some personal misfortune, he shames him into payment. He also uses the sentence, "There was, I suppose, some unhappy reason for your failure to pay.")

Any references to the creditor's fairness, to the credit he has extended, or the favors he has shown in the past can be used to awaken the customer's sense of shame.

An open threat to shame a delinquent by taking public action is the strongest means of appealing to this sense, but is used only as a last resort because it always awakens anger. Such sentences as the following illustrate this method. These awaken fear as well as shame:

We should very much regret taking this action, as it would result in the facts of the case being known to the trade in general.

---

If this draft is presented at your bank, it will, we feel, cast an unfavorable reflection upon your financial standing.

The calls of a collector at your home might make an unpleasant impression on your friends, and consequently we are very reluctant to be forced to take this means of securing payment.

---

We feel that in justice to you we should use every attempt to get settlement of the account you owe us, because otherwise at the end of this month we shall be obliged to send in your name, according to our agreement, to the local credit bureau, where it will be listed and the facts of your unwillingness to pay will be known to the other merchants of the city.

---

You are of course aware that a list of persons concerned in court proceedings is known to a very large number of persons, so that if we enter suit against you, not only are we certain of obtaining judgment, but the fact that you have once been sued for an account will reflect upon your standing and will make it less easy for you to do business in the future.

**The Appeal to Fear.**—"All diplomacy," says a famous diplomat, "is but the threat of force." The ability to enforce one's rights is a necessity if one's persuasion is to gain a respectful hearing. The man whose language and bearing carry authority will secure more attention by a word than a weakling will gain by a half-hour's bluster.

The attempt to frighten the debtor is sometimes like the old-fashioned blunderbuss, more dangerous to the man who shoots it off than to the target. If used too strongly where circumstances do not warrant it, the debtor, instead of being terrified, will grow angry and delay payment as long as possible; or he may feel contempt for a creditor who threatens more than he can perform. It destroys goodwill.

A safe rule to follow is that letters from the creditor himself should never contain more than a mere suggestion of the appeal to fear. If finally considered advisable the account may be turned over to an outside agency with instructions to use the best skill it possesses; but even the outside agency is usually most successful when it shows leniency and appeals to fairness, pride, and self-interest while keeping the show of force in the background. Only in dealing with ignorant and inexperienced debtors who are able to pay but stubbornly determined not to, will vigorous threats be of much service.



**The Lion's Imagination.**—Lion-tamers are said to carry in the right hand a whip and in the left hand a rod. Though they may lash the beast repeatedly with the whip, they make only a feint of striking him with the rod. The lion believes a terrible power to reside in the rod, and since he never feels it he continues to fear it. The lion is subdued by his imagination.

Whether true or not, the story is a good parallel to the collection man's use of fear. He continually uses "moral suasion" with his debtors, touching them by appeals to pride, fair play, self-interest, shame, etc. But he makes only a feint of striking them with the authority of the law. If the case gets beyond him he is likely to turn it over to the attendant with the pitchfork. But let us not push the analogy too far.

**Classifying Customers.**—The classification of debtors into good-pay, slow-pay, and poor-pay, on the basis of past experience or credit information, guides the credit man in his use of the appeal to fear. In his reminders to good-pay customers he will carry courtesy and leniency to the extreme, though he continually "presses the button" of the various appeals that are likely to make a spark in the debtor's nervous system and set fire to the train of action. The slow-pay customer will receive a little more vigorous treatment, while the poor-pay customer, if delinquent, finds his affair pressed rapidly to a conclusion.

**Phrases That Suggest Urgency.**—Certain words and phrases always carry the suggestion of urgency and should be used with care, especially when writing to a sensitive customer, lest they destroy goodwill. With previous delinquents they can be used more freely. The collection man should have the customer's record before him; then, if he writes less strongly than the occasion seems to demand, he will probably say about the right thing.

The following phrases suggesting urgency are given in the order of their strength:

1. Reference to past unanswered correspondence.
2. "Immediately" or "at your earliest convenience" when applied to a letter or remittance.
3. Mention of a definite date as "by July 6," "in three days," or "by return mail."
4. A command, as, "Let us hear from you," or "Send us." To preface these phrases by "please" makes them more courteous. Still milder is a question, as, "Will you not let us hear from you?" or a conditional statement as, "If you will let us hear from you, we shall be greatly obliged." Much more sharp than "Please let us hear," is "Kindly let us hear."
5. The words "must," "be compelled to," "demand," "require," "insist," "it is imperative."
6. "Delinquent," or "slow-pay."
7. A veiled threat, like a reference to "other measures," or specific mention of an attorney or agency.

Usually one sharp phrase in a letter is more effective than several. The effect of such a phrase can be varied by putting it in various positions; at the end of a letter it has an emphasis like the crack of a whip; but buried in a paragraph and followed by pleasant language, it stings without leaving a scar.

**Increasing Severity.**—The chief appeal to fear is through an evident advance in the severity of the tone adopted in interviews or letters. Never allow a debtor to become perfectly sure of the steps that are to be taken. If you do, he soon learns to discount them in advance, and to wait as long as patience allows. With a good customer who has not previously been delinquent, the various stages of notification, reminder, discussion, draft, outside collector, and suit might be gone through.

Other phrases that appeal to fear are the following :

We should regret very much to feel that you were purposely neglecting your account.

---

We shall be obliged to proceed (take it that you wish us to proceed) in the usual manner (to take our customary action).\*

\* This reference to customary action shows that the creditor is certain of success.

A copy of this letter will be held as a memorandum in my files for ten days.

---

You realize that it would be a serious matter for you to jeopardize your credit standing by further postponement of this settlement.

---

We are sure you do not wish your friends and neighbors to be embarrassed by any questions our attorney might ask about you.

---

While you may be personally entirely willing to run your chances of court action, we trust that you will remember the unpleasantness this would bring upon those near and dear to you, and that you will not oblige us to begin proceedings that would be attended by unpleasant consequences.

The warning or notification of the draft carries with it some element of fear and annoyance, and it is sometimes advisable to write in a manner which will increase this feeling in the customer.

The mention of referring the account to some other person carries with it a degree of fear, proportionate to the authority of that person and his power to inflict annoyance, to cause shame, loss of credit, of business opportunity, of reputation, of money, etc. Thus the account may be referred to the collection department, the credit department, the credit manager—mentioning him by name—the controller, the bursar, a special collector inside the house, an outside collector, a collection agency, or an attorney.

**The Appeal to Curiosity.**—Can curiosity be used by the collection man? The beginning of a collection letter may be so cleverly handled, especially if this beginning is a story, that the reader is curious to see how it will end and reads through. But suppose curiosity is awakened by the first letter of a series; the result will be that he will wait to see what the creditor has to say next and will postpone payment until he gets the whole series. The creditor is not in the business of providing entertainment to delinquents, and if he is wise he will cut the customer's amusement short with a draft or a call from

an attorney. Incidentally, it is a good principle not to write two clever letters in succession, but to follow up a good-natured appeal by a severe one.

A letter sometimes used by agencies and others contains the sentence,

Unless you do so, we shall be obliged to take steps that will cause you the greatest astonishment.

When this brings in the money, it does so by stimulating the debtor's fear through his imagination. He is not at all curious to find out what will happen to him—he does not want to find out—but the novel phrase surprises him and he pays on impulse. If he were really made curious, he would postpone the payment and wait “to see what came out of the box.”

**Appeal to Saving and Acquisitiveness.**—The desire to save money or to make it can sometimes be used by a creditor who, despairing of collection in full and not wishing to undertake suit, may offer the delinquent a slight discount for payment within a set time, or a bonus either in the form of cash, a book, an article from stock, etc. These methods are rarely used except with customers to whom only a single sale is made, or from whom orders will no longer be accepted. They are sometimes used, however, by creditors who are conscious that the customer has been “oversold,” or that the goods sold him were not worth the full purchase price. What these business men need is education as to methods of sale rather than methods of collection.

In a great emergency, it may be decided to extend the usual discount as an inducement for prompt payment. One such letter reads:

In view of the special circumstances existing at this time we have decided to offer our customers a bonus of 2 per cent for all payments made on or before March 1. This will be given as an appreciation for the goodwill shown in the prompt remittance.

The frank appeal to goodwill preserves the offer from appearing as a sign of weakness.

A concern selling cigars by mail with terms cash ten days after receiving goods and privilege of sampling the contents, at one time wrote to certain delinquents over the signature of its president.

I am not going to turn your account over to a collection agent who will hound you and annoy you and destroy any goodwill you may still feel for me and my cigars, besides demanding for his services 50 per cent of the amount you owe me.

Here is what I have determined to do. I will make you your own collection agency. The amount now due is \$10.75. Simply mail me your check for \$5.38 and I will send you a bill receipted in full, showing 50 per cent cash and 50 per cent collector's fees. Send me this check quickly before I change my mind.

The danger of this method is that the dishonest smoker of cigars might spread the good word among his acquaintances that he knew a place where you could buy cigars for half-price.

The most common form of the savings appeal is made when the creditor hints at the expense of legal proceedings, which must be borne by the debtor. To a stubborn debtor, this can be said good-naturedly :

You know well enough that you must pay for every step we take—why force us into action that costs you money?

**The Desire for Success.**—The appeal to this desire is implied in all sincere resale or constructive letters, and it may be employed in connection with other appeals.

We are sincerely interested in your success and make these suggestions with your own interest in view.

—this appeals also to pride and self-interest. It can be combined with the appeal to fear, as,

Unless you meet your obligations fairly, you cannot hope to win.

**Other Appeals.**—The instinct of *imitation* is made use of when the creditor says,

We find on investigation that 90 per cent of our customers pay on presentation of the statement.

or

It is certainly very pleasant to have our confidence supported by an analysis of our business recently made, which discloses the fact that only a fraction of one per cent of our customers are ever seriously delinquent.

This not only appeals to pride, but suggests that the example of these customers be followed.

*Competition* may be excited. Certain towns using the "Pay-Up Week" scheme have by means of a cash prize stimulated the townspeople to see who would pay the largest amount. Competition between salesmen to make a good showing in collection from their respective territories should always be employed.

Finally, the motive of *patriotism* can, with entire justice, be appealed to in collection. The creditor who educates his trade to sound business habits and prompt payments, by so doing confirms and strengthens the credit stability of this country and performs a national service. There are many credit men who are entitled to the honor of using this appeal by virtue of the broad-minded business statesmanship they have displayed in their country's time of need.

**The Appeal to Pity.**—Business men long ago discovered that it was unbusinesslike to appeal to the pity of their customers as a means of securing payments. The plea, "We need the money," is no longer offered as an excuse for the efforts of the collection man; some less humiliating statement of the fact may be employed to show the debtor quietly but firmly that the creditor cannot afford to be overindulgent. Professional men, however, often fail to realize that to appeal from a position of strength brings better results than to appeal from a position of weakness.

One who was the football of fortune, Oliver Goldsmith, learned through bitter experience the truth of the matter. In the third number of *The Bee* he expresses the philosophy of Jack Spindle, a beggar: that to have much or to seem to have it is the only way to have more, since it is the man who has no

occasion to borrow that alone finds numbers willing to lend. "You then, oh ye beggars of my acquaintance," exclaims Spindle, "whether in rags or lace, whether in Kent Street or the Mall, whether at Smyrna or St. Giles', might I advise you as a friend, never to seem in want of the favour you solicit. Apply to every passion but pity for redress. You may find relief from vanity, from self-interest, or from avarice, but never from compassion."

**Combining Appeals.**—As is suggested by the diagram on page 112, appeals to the sense of advantage can be combined with appeals to the sense of obligation in different proportions as the procedure advances. A letter that begins strongly and ends mildly is one that contains an appeal to shame or fear reinforced by appeal to pride. If it begins mildly and ends more strongly it probably contains an appeal to pride or goodwill followed by a threat of stronger measures that appeal to the sense of fear. The letter which ends more mildly than it begins, moreover, has the effect of leniency and arouses goodwill.

**Surprise and Impulse.**—Every collection manager who prepares a series of collection letters, or every sales manager who has to handle a sales follow-up, is acquainted with the principles of surprise and impulse, though possibly he has not given them a name. Variety is more than the spice of life in collections—it is life itself, for the follow-up letters which have no variety are dead indeed. If collection procedure always travels the same road, the delinquent debtor anticipates its steps, and discounts in advance the means that will be taken to bring him to payment. For example, one large house which had always employed first a statement, then a draft, and then a letter inquiring why the draft was dishonored, discovered that a great proportion of its drafts were dishonored. Investigation showed that the same customers, at fairly frequent intervals, overstepped their time limit and refused to pay the draft sent them, knowing from experience that the house would allow two weeks to pass before sending the account to an attorney. This likewise is the danger of an unchanged series of form letters. The customer recognizes the stock language, for

he has received them before, and awaits until the entire series has spent itself and until real pressure is applied. Abundant variety in forms is necessary if they are to produce surprise.

The familiar story of the debtor who failed to reply to form collection letters because he wanted to get the entire series to use on his own delinquents, has gone the rounds often enough to warn us of the weakness of a series of unchanged forms. Any collection procedure, whether of drafts, forms, or dictated letters, which repeats itself frequently to the same customer, presently loses its teeth, and fails to arouse the debtor to action.

Any man who becomes delinquent for reasons not under his control, and who has kept his creditor informed of his position, can rely on his own good reputation to insure that the creditor will take no unexpected steps. But even the good-pay customer, and certainly the poor-pay customer, is stimulated to action by uncertainty as to what steps the creditor will take next.

**The Turn in the Road.**—One collection manager of considerable success told of how this principle became impressed upon his own mind. His suburban home was located on a shady road a few hundred yards away from an abrupt curve.

"I often sit on my piazza," said this man, "and wonder, 'What will come around that bend in the road?' One day it occurred to me, 'Have my collection letters that perpetual spice of interest, or do my customers when they get the first one know what the last one will be?' Then and there I made up my mind that no man, not even the best customer on our list, should ever be able to tell in advance what was coming around the turn of the road." Fortunately, the methods of collection are so numerous that variety and surprise are by no means difficult to produce.

A great deal of the success of advertising is due to the pleasant surprise it has given to a public accustomed to cut-and-dried methods of sale. In like manner the collection letters which use various appeals, and which give evidence of an alert mind which can adapt itself to the problem in hand, succeed not



only because of the logic of their method or because they have touched precisely the right emotion which serves as a spring of action, but partly because they are "different."

**Impulse.**—The companion to the principle of surprise is the principle of impulse. Though men are reasoning beings, and an undercurrent of logical conviction always aids in determining our actions, still most of our decisions are made on impulse. A certain course seems reasonable and so we adopt it because a decision must be made. This principle comes to the aid of the collection manager who writes courteous letters with an appeal to reason. Most men, even those who are occasionally dishonest, are good-natured and will oblige a man who treats them decently. Suppose such a man receives a reasonable letter in the same mail with less reasonable letters from other houses. The first letter suggests a *reason* why he should pay; the others are mere demands. Without troubling himself to remember that he should treat all his creditors alike, the delinquent acts on impulse and pays the account of the house that has given him what he calls "good treatment."

"I have just had a lesson on collections from the home office," remarked a salesman of the National Cash Register Company. "There are a couple of men here in town who owe me, and owe about everybody else—poor skates, who never have done a successful business and never will. Yet the credit man has been writing them kind, polite letters, asking them, 'Can you tell us whether there is any reason why you should not pay?' Ridiculous! Any reason? Why, there were any number of reasons, beginning with the fact that they didn't have the money. Next time I went to Dayton I began to remonstrate with him. 'Go back to your selling,' he told me. 'You don't know anything about this collection business. Those poor-pay fellows are used to being hit over the head by every one of their creditors, and when a courteous letter comes along, that looks as if we appreciated their business, it surprises them so that they pay us in preference to the other fellows.' And," concluded the cash register salesman, "I believe he was right."

**A Japanese Collection Letter.**—A Pacific Coast concern had a thick-skinned customer on whom the credit department could make no impression whatever. A young Japanese clerk, employed in the department, asked and was granted an opportunity to try his hand at collecting the account. To the amazement of the entire office, inside of forty-eight hours a check was received in full. The credit manager, who was both pleased and mystified by the unexpected development, asked the clerk to show him a copy of the letter that had succeeded where all of the department's other attempts at collection had failed. The letter read as follows:

Honorable Sir:

We have received no reply to repeated statements and several letters we have sent you in regard to your past-due balance of \$.....

Unless we receive check in full payment of your account by return mail, what will happen to you next will be amazing.

Respectfully yours,

**Short Letters for Slow-Payers.**—In some cases a brief, vigorous letter of a few lines will do more to jar the habitual procrastinator into action than a communication of five or six long paragraphs. It is therefore worth while to try, occasionally, letters such as the following:

Dear Mr. Smith:

Come on, now, and show us that you appreciate our patience!

Take out the old fountain pen, sign a check for \$..... and mail it to us before you go home tonight.

It will make your account look a lot better.

Very truly yours,

---

Dear Mr. Jones:

I happen to know that you enjoy a good cigar.

Will you help me to win one?

I have bet the treasurer a Corona Corona that you will have a check for \$..... here by the first mail Friday morning.

We smokers must stand by each other!

Very truly yours,

Dear Mr. Brown:

I think I have figured out why our letters thus far haven't produced that payment of \$ ..... to sweeten your account.

Our letters are too long.

Is this one short enough?

Very truly yours,

---

Dear Mr. Hill:

You probably haven't played football lately, but I remember that you used to be a star tackle on the ..... eleven.

We'll give you a cheer if you stage a comeback.

Tackle the job of reducing that account, and send us a check for \$... ..

Signals—four, eleven, forty-four!

Very truly yours,

## CHAPTER 38

### THE TRAVELING COLLECTOR

**Extending the Cruising Radius.**—One of the earliest discoveries made by the pioneers in credit department organization was that credit as well as sales representatives must get out into the field. Either the credit manager himself or some one capable of acting for him must visit customers in their places of business, adjust misunderstandings, and make collections that cannot be effected by ordinary correspondence methods.

In many enterprises the credit manager is required to spend a certain portion of his time traveling in the field. In some cases this amounts to as much as six or seven months in every year, and the credit manager sees personally all of the concern's principal customers.

In addition, there have been developed three distinct types of traveling credit representatives:

1. Those whose main objective is rendering "business service" to the customer, with no responsibility for collections.
2. Those who combine business service and collection functions.
3. Those who travel for collection or adjustment purposes only.

**Qualifications of Traveling Representatives.**—Representatives of type 1 must be thoroughly familiar with both the credit and the sales policies of the house and the trade. As "business doctors" they must know the basic principles of effective marketing, and be able to advise the customer in regard to purchasing, advertising and selling. They must also be willing to go into the customer's establishment and work side by side with him, for a time, as though they were on his payroll.

Type 2 calls for these same qualifications and, in addition, knowledge of sound collection principles and methods. The

chief requirement for type 3 is collecting ability, but if this is combined with a fair amount of marketing knowledge and judgment, the collector's task is made much easier.

**The "Trouble Hunter."**—Some companies use the traveling representative only as an emergency man, to be sent wherever difficulties develop that cannot be straightened out by correspondence. The trouble may be dissatisfaction with goods received, disputes over accounts rendered, overselling by the salesman or any of a hundred other complications. In any case, the traveling representative's job is to smooth out the difficulty, placate the customer, and bring him back to a paying frame of mind.

This work calls for exceptional diplomacy and tact. The representative must "watch his step" from the minute he enters the customer's place of business until he leaves for the next assignment, which may be two hours, two days, or two weeks later. M. L. Houser, who served as traveling representative of a large steel company for a number of years, suggests that, "It is important never to seem in a hurry." Often, he says, the debtor, hoping that the traveler will be anxious to get away quickly, tries to hold out and thus dictate the terms of settlement. Whenever a dealer asked Mr. Houser, "When do you want to get away?" he replied: "I have plenty of time. Whenever I go into a town I never know how long I shall be there. Your convenience is mine."

**A Typical Collection Case.**—Among several interesting cases handled by Mr. Houser and reported by him to members of the National Association of Credit Men in the *Credit Monthly*,<sup>1</sup> is that of "A. and Co." who operated a string of lumber yards in a western state. "A. and Co." owed the steel company \$6,000, and paid no attention to statements or collection letters. Going to the city where the chain's main office was located, Mr. Houser cornered Mr. A. himself, but could get nothing out of him but the argument that, because of depressed business conditions, it was up to the manufacturer to carry the distributor and not press him for payment.

<sup>1</sup> Now *Credit and Financial Management*.

Excusing himself and promising to return "after he had attended to his mail," Mr. Houser went directly to Mr. A.'s bank, and found that "A. and Co." had pledged to the bank, as security for loans, all of its realty and stock. He then went back and told Mr. A.: "I have your bank's permission to tell you that I have been given full information about your affairs. I believe I know what you can do and cannot do. The only question now is whether you will satisfy us or we will start proceedings which will be very embarrassing to you." At this Mr. A. exclaimed: "My God, have you ruined me with my bank?" Mr. Houser replied: "I think not, for I could tell them nothing they did not already know. Now, here is what we should like you to give us:

- "1. A demand note covering the entire amount you owe us.
2. A check for \$1,200, dated the day you are to receive payment for the yard you have sold, to apply on the note.
3. Your customers' notes, assigned to us, for one and one-half times what you will still owe us after we cash the check, you to secure these notes from your customers who have open accounts at your various yards. When cashed, these notes will be applied on the balance of your principal note, the remainder, of course, to be returned to you."

The visit to the bank and the frank statement of demands took every breath of wind out of Mr. A.'s sails. He agreed to all three points without further argument, and at the time the case was reported by Mr. Houser, had paid off \$3,000 on the total indebtedness of \$6,000.

**Retail Collections.**—Department stores and concerns selling direct to consumer on instalment terms make extensive use of the traveling collector, although some concerns have recently abandoned the plan on account of the high costs involved. A survey made by the Policyholders Service Bureau of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company developed the fact that three different types of collectors are being used:

1. Investigator type (used to locate "skips").
2. Investigator type (used to induce customers to come to the store).
3. Aggressive type (used to collect the money due or repossess the merchandise).

The report on this survey reveals that in many of the stores contacted there has been a change in the method of compensating collectors. Most of the stores formerly paid on the basis of a straight commission or a small salary plus commission. The general practice now appears to be a straight salary basis. The chief reason for the change was that collectors on a commission basis ignored small accounts in the outlying districts and centered their efforts on the accounts which were larger and more accessible, as well as more profitable to the collector.

**Procedure of a Furniture House.**—One of the companies contacted in the survey, a large furniture concern, has an unusually aggressive policy in regard to delinquent accounts. This company's collectors frequently have doors shut in their faces, but with the curious result that a check is received in the office within two or three days. The collectors call on the same day every week, and are expected to collect personally one or two payments, attempting to induce the customer to make future payments at the store.

If a customer is not at home, the collector leaves a card explaining the purpose of his call and asking the purchaser to pay at the store or by check through the mail. When a customer has been delinquent to the extent of three payments, a collector of a more aggressive type is put on the case. He demands entry "for the purpose of inspecting the merchandise." This is generally effective, as it leads the customer to believe that the company, preparing the way for repossession, is examining the merchandise to see whether it has a good resale value. The collector may even drop a hint that his call is for that purpose.

If this call does not produce payment, it is followed up by an "attorney letter" from the credit department. If that fails,

a summons is served and repossession proceedings are begun, although in certain cases when a customer offers a reasonable settlement the company accepts it rather than to take back the merchandise.

The collectors employed by this house are fully informed, when they are taken on, concerning the collection policy of the house. But the actual methods used in collecting accounts are left to be determined largely by the individual collector's experience and ability.

**Procedure of a Publishing House.**—Another concern contributing to the survey was a large publishing house selling subscriptions to periodicals with individual sales averaging from \$5 to \$12. The magazines are, of course, delivered by mail, and payment is expected immediately on receipt of bill. Accounts sixty days past due are turned over to collectors, each of whom is assigned a special territory and paid on a straight commission basis. The house requires that each collector have an automobile, with insurance coverage, and pays him a flat rate of \$10 a week for the use of his car. In a few cases where a good collector is found who has no automobile, the company takes him on and restricts his territory to points within a city or suburbs where a cheap transportation service is available. Such men receive a straight 45 per cent commission.

Each collector reports daily to the office on a form giving the following information:

1. Name of subscriber.....
2. Name of periodical.....
3. Amount collected \$.....
4. Collection remitted \$.....
5. Commission retained \$.....

This report is made out in triplicate, the original going to the circulation credit manager, the duplicate to the cashier's office, and the triplicate being retained by the collector. If a collector contacts an account on which a promise to pay "within a few days" is made, the collection card for the account



is flagged so that the collector will get credit for his commission if payment is received by mail.

In this publishing house, the actual collections of the total amount of accounts assigned to collectors average from 50 to 70 per cent, and the average weekly earnings in commissions amount to from \$30 to \$50 per collector.

## CHAPTER 39

### TRADE ACCEPTANCES

**Object of the Trade Acceptance.**—Many a business man has determined to use trade acceptances in his collection procedure. He does so for the same reason that has led him to offer a discount for prompt payment; that is, in order to set his capital free for use in his own business instead of allowing it to remain in the hands of his customer during the usual credit period. The seller on receiving the acceptance usually discounts it at the bank and gets his money at once. The buyer, when the acceptance becomes due, pays the bank instead of the seller; if unable to pay at maturity he secures an extension and gives his note.

Because this operation increases the amount of capital available for business in the country, it is being urged as a measure in which all merchants should cooperate so far as possible. It has great value also as a cure for loose credit methods and carelessness in payment. Moreover, it transfers the credit burden from the back of the seller to that of the buyer where it logically belongs.

There is nothing essentially new in the trade acceptance method. It is common in Europe and has been used to some extent here.

The campaign for its use is essentially a movement to increase the amount of credit money in the United States and to reform the abuses of the open-book-account system, by popularizing an alternative system.

**Selling the Acceptance Idea.**—Since it presents so many obvious advantages, especially in collection from customers who have ordered small bills of goods or upon whom for other reasons the credit hold is not strong, credit managers are enthusiastically advocating its use. Many houses wisely re-

<b>TRADE ACCEPTANCE</b> <small>STANDARD FORM APPROVED BY THE                      NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CREDIT MEN                      AMERICAN ACCEPTANCE OF COUNCIL                      FEDERAL RESERVE SYSTEM</small>			
No. _____		_____ 19____	
		(DATE)	
ON _____	PAY TO THE ORDER OF OURSELVES	(CITY OF DRAWER)	
		BY _____	
		(SIGNATURE)	
		LOCATION OF BANK	
		PAYABLE AT _____	
		DATE _____	
TO _____	(NAME OF DRAWEE)	(CITY OF DRAWER)	
		(STREET ADDRESS)	
		BY _____	
		(NAME OF DRAWER)	
THE TRANSACTION WHICH GIVES RISE TO THIS INSTRUMENT IS THE PURCHASE OF GOODS BY THE ACCEPTOR FROM THE DRAWER. THE DRAWEE MAY ACCEPT THIS BILL PAYABLE AT ANY BANK, BANKER OR TRUST COMPANY IN THE UNITED STATES WHICH SUCH DRAWEE MAY DESIGNATE.			
		DOLLARS (\$ _____)	

Figure 21. Trade Acceptance Form

frain from offering too much explanation by mail but simply request that it be used, sometimes also sending a pamphlet dealing with the subject. The buyer who uses the acceptance recognizes the fact that he will pay within the credit period in any case—which is true of the great majority of commercial transactions—and he is willing to sign the acceptance as an accommodation to the seller. He recognizes also that this method makes him more careful of his obligations and tends to prevent overbuying, the rock on which so many merchants split.

Acceptances broaden the buying field of the merchant. By means of a letter of credit from his bank to the effect that, under certain conditions and up to a certain agreed figure, it will accept all bills drawn for his account, he is able to make his purchases advantageously, even in markets where he is unknown. The system is thus to the advantage of the merchant who wishes to buy in new markets.

**The Acceptance Explained in Detail.**—Fuller explanation of the various points connected with trade acceptance is set forth in the following questions and answers reprinted by permission from a pamphlet published by the Irving Trust Company of New York City, entitled "Practical Questions and Answers on the Trade Acceptance Method."

1. *What is a trade acceptance?*  
A negotiable certificate of indebtedness arising out of a current transaction in merchandise.
2. *In what form may the trade acceptance be issued?*  
See facsimile of trade acceptance form in Figure 21.
3. *Give the ordinary distinction between a trade acceptance and a draft.*  
The trade acceptance is confined to credit obligations arising from the sale of goods, and must have a definite maturity. The draft may cover various kinds of transactions, may be payable on demand, at sight, or at the end of a stated time.
4. *Give the ordinary distinction between a trade acceptance and a promissory note.*

The trade acceptance is limited to obligations arising from the sale of goods. The promissory note may cover practically any kind of obligation. . . .

14. *What is the purpose of the trade acceptance?*  
To express a credit obligation arising from the sale of goods. . . .
16. *Describe the business practice involved in a merchandise transaction in which the trade acceptance is used.*
- (a) A definite bargain is consummated between the seller and the buyer of goods, and an amount due with a definite term agreed upon.
  - (b) The seller draws the acceptance and presents it to the buyer.
  - (c) If the buyer is willing to assume:
    - That title to the goods has passed to him,
    - That the trade acceptance is in proper form, and
    - That the conditions of sale have been complied with,he accepts by writing across the face of the instrument, the word "Accepted," the date, and place of payment, and his name, and returns it to the seller, or to the bank presenting it.
  - (d) The seller either:
    - Holds it until maturity, or
    - Arranges to have it negotiated. This process may bring the acceptor, the bank, the note broker and the federal reserve bank into the transaction.
  - (e) The acceptor either:
    - Pays it at maturity, or
    - Secures an extension of time. This is accomplished by treating it as a past-due obligation and covering it by a promissory note.
17. *How may a seller introduce the trade acceptance method?*
- (a) By making it a condition of sale.
  - (b) By writing an explanatory letter, following it up by a trade acceptance.
  - (c) By writing a short explanatory note of a few lines on a perforated section above or below the acceptance, explaining its operation.
18. *Why should a concern which takes acceptances also give acceptances?*  
Because:
- (a) The acceptance method is desirable from the standpoint of both seller and buyer.
  - (b) The fact that a concern gives acceptances serves as an excellent argument to induce customers to employ the same method. . . .
24. *Give some advantages the buyer derives from the trade acceptance method.*
- (a) Develops careful buying.

- (b) Enables him to keep better track of his outstanding obligations, thereby avoiding the evils of overextension.
  - (c) Strengthens his credit and puts him in the position of a preferred buyer.
  - (d) Develops in him the habit of prompt payment and furnishes him with an excellent excuse for requiring prompt payment from his customers.
  - (e) Enables him to realize that credit is as tangible as cash and should be guarded and used accordingly.
  - (f) Eliminates wastage and lost motion attending the open-book-account method.
  - (g) Is good business because it releases business capital for new transactions.
  - (h) Improves the chances of the buyer of small means to operate in successful competition with the large buyer.
  - (i) Helps the buyer by making him deal always in current transactions rather than in long-drawn-out book accounts.
  - (j) As the buyer often becomes a seller, the same advantages that apply to the seller apply to him.
  - (k) Serves as a tonic to the business organizations concerned.
  - (l) Prevents the accumulation of overdue accounts.
  - (m) Develops a sounder and more serious attitude toward buyer's own obligations.
25. *Give some advantages the seller derives from the trade acceptance method.*
- (a) Relieves him from the burden of financing his customers and the consequent burdening of his own capital.
  - (b) Enables him to conduct business on a more systematic basis, with a more regular income schedule.
  - (c) Puts the burden of proving correctness of the details of the merchandise transaction where it belongs—upon the buyer.
26. *Does the buyer in accepting waive any of the legal rights against the seller which he would enjoy under the open-book-account method?*
- No, but if after accepting he pleads incorrect deliveries, he must prove his case.
27. *Give some additional advantages the seller derives from the trade acceptance method.*
- (a) Provides a liquid asset.
  - (b) Reduces the expense of collections and simplifies the process, by making it a detail in banking machinery.
  - (c) Promotes the economical treatment of merchandise and enables the seller to do business at a smaller operating cost.
  - (d) Relieves him from the necessity of selling his accounts at the high rate of interest usually exacted.

- (e) Enables him to offer the bank additional security.
  - (f) Strengthens seller's financial statement, by showing the character of his accounts.
  - (g) Enables the seller to gauge more accurately the commercial standing of the buyer.
  - (h) Tends to confine borrowing to funds actually needed.
  - (i) Seller inoffensively assists the buyer to complete his contract in the way in which he originally intended to complete it.
  - (j) Enables seller to calculate his collections more accurately for stated periods.
  - (k) Enables seller to facilitate his customer's business by the extension of credit and by deliveries in a way not always possible under the open-account system.
  - (l) Gives seller two-named paper to present to his bank for discount.
  - (m) Enables seller effectively to dispose of the possible necessity of subsequent proof of the legal status of the transaction and to exhibit for inspection the highest possible class of book accounts. . . .
29. *Give some advantages general business derives from the trade acceptance method.*
- (a) Provides a check against carelessness and extravagance by reminding the debtor constantly that his credit may be put to the test.
  - (b) Enables invested capital to do considerably more than its present volume of work with less risk.
  - (c) Lowers borrowing rates, because of the production of standard paper, because of the elimination of unnecessary risk, and because the Federal Reserve Board offers preferential rediscount rates for this class of paper.
  - (d) Makes capital more fluid by releasing funds now tied up in open-book accounts and by substituting readily negotiable commercial paper for non-negotiable book accounts.
  - (e) Improves trade relations between buyer and seller by clearly defining their respective obligations. . . .
31. *Name the chief objections to the open-book-account method.*
- (a) Provides an easy method for the abuse of credit by buyers who allow their accounts to remain unpaid for unreasonable periods, without payment of interest.
  - (b) Time of actual payment indefinite, as both parties have become accustomed to the abuse of the extension privilege.
  - (c) Not "liquid" assets and therefore not a good basis for credit.
  - (d) Creates the possibility of carrying sales argument into credit period.

- (e) Unnecessarily ties up an unreasonable portion of the merchandise value involved.
  - (f) Ties up seller's capital without a stated compensation to him.
  - (g) Costly in collections, extensions, trade discounts, and abuse of sales terms.
  - (h) Unnecessarily forces seller to perform a banking function for the buyer.
  - (i) Tends to raise prices, this being the only way in which the seller can protect himself against the burdens forced upon him. . . .
33. *What evils, then, in our present commercial methods would the trade acceptance curtail?*
- (a) Practice of taking unearned and unauthorized discounts.
  - (b) Losses by bad debts and the evils attending the carrying of overdue accounts.
  - (c) The secret assignment of book accounts.
  - (d) Practice of cancelling orders and returning goods without sufficient reasons.
  - (e) Overbuying and overselling.
34. *Does the trade acceptance eliminate the promissory note?*
- No, the promissory note deals with all kinds of business transactions—the trade acceptance with current merchandise transactions alone. The trade acceptance is not to be given for borrowed money, or past-due obligations. . . .
36. *Will the trade acceptance curtail the extension of credit?*
- No, it does not change the term of the credit—simply carries the credit in better form.
37. *Will the acceptance hurt credit?*
- No, the merchant whose statements show Acceptances Payable and Acceptances Receivable should be entitled to a higher rating than one whose statements show Accounts Payable and Accounts Receivable.
38. *Why is this true?*
- Because:
- (a) The merchant who *brings his transactions out into the open and serves notice upon the business world that he is willing to meet his obligations at maturity* is a better business risk and hence entitled to better treatment than one who has his accounts carried upon an indefinite and unbusinesslike arrangement such as the open-book account.
  - (b) Willingness to use the acceptance method shows that a business man wishes to conduct his affairs upon a strictly business basis. Public knowledge of this fact is sure to find favorable reflection in his business standing.



**Limitations of the Trade Acceptance.**—In order to present both sides of the question of trade acceptances, some sections are taken from a letter written by the assistant treasurer of the B. F. Goodrich Company, showing why the trade acceptance is not adaptable for use by his company. The very large discount of 5 per cent offered in this instance, together with other factors, led this company to its decision. This statement should not be construed as opposing the use of trade acceptances; it merely explains certain limitations in their use.

As you know, we are definitely committed to the granting of an unusually large cash discount. Our 5 per cent cash discount which is a part of our terms for all branches of our line, is equaled only by the cash discount granted on a few special lines in the garment field. You are familiar with the reasons for the granting of this unusually large cash discount. Since we are dealing largely with merchants of limited capital, we do everything that we can to make a man turn his capital often.

The primary purpose of the trade acceptance movement is to expand the credit structure of the nation. Of course this expansion does not in any way increase the actual amount of wealth. What we strive to do with our long cash discount is to make a man turn his capital frequently and it follows that every time that he turns his capital and makes a profit it is producing wealth.

From the standpoint of the national interest, it has been held by a dozen or more of the country's largest bankers, to whom our particular problem has been submitted in detail, that we serve the country better by making our customers' dollars work overtime than we would by deferring payments and lengthening terms, in accordance with the trade acceptance plan.

Looking at this question from a standpoint solely of the interests of the Goodrich Company, there are several things to be considered: First of all, the acceptance plan has been devised to assist the man whose results in handling open accounts have been just average, or less than average. It so happens that our results, over a period of years, have been very much better than the average. Our accounts receivable are not uncertain; our losses are negligible; our cash discount terms are enforced in all of our dealings with all of our customers. If we are to put into operation a system, which is planned to bring up the man who has been getting poor results to a level where he can expect average returns, we actually will have to bring ourselves

down to a lower level than that upon which we have been doing business. This is just a matter of mathematics. We are not taking credit to ourselves, because our collection results have been exceptionally good (we know that they can be better), but we do not care to lose any of our "punch" merely because a lot of other fellows have slow accounts and cannot enforce cash discount terms.

If we were to make a general use of trade acceptances, we probably could discount those acceptances and in this way borrow money at a figure slightly under the current market rate for single name paper. At the same time, if we did this we would be merely borrowing money on the name of the B. F. Goodrich Company, so far as most of the acceptances might be concerned, because we have very few customers whose names on the pieces of commercial paper would mean anything as a basis for borrowing from our banks in New York, Philadelphia, Boston, or Chicago.

Furthermore, it would be necessary to create a special department to handle these acceptances. The maintenance of such a department would represent a considerable item of expense. It would also be necessary to set up and to keep up a reserve to pay discounted acceptances which our customers did not meet when they came due. The interest on this reserve alone would more than eat up the slight saving in the cost of borrowed money secured on acceptances.

It must be borne in mind also, that if we were to use acceptances regularly throughout the year, we would face a necessary lengthening of our terms. We could not profitably arrange to discount and rediscount customers' paper which would run for less than 60 days. This would react directly upon the Credit Department, because, instead of being in a position to shut off upon a man when he did not take advantage of his cash discount for a single month's purchases, our cash discount would be eliminated and we would have no excuse for shutting off deliveries until a man failed to meet his first acceptance at the end of 60, or possibly even 90 days.

The credit men also would face the problem of handling customers who would give acceptances, sincerely believing that these acceptances represented cash and actually paid their accounts. For example, a dealer, with a credit limit of \$5,000 would order \$5,000 worth of goods from us, under the dating proposition, in January and would give us an acceptance for \$5,000 when the goods were delivered. It would be a very difficult thing for us to convince that dealer that by giving us his name on a piece of paper he had not actually paid his bill. If he were to give us an acceptance, it would be nothing more than

natural for him to expect to come right in to order and receive another \$5,000 worth of goods on open account. Of course the acceptance would merely serve as a basis for borrowing and the transaction would produce no money except such money as the B. F. Goodrich Company would borrow and pay for. The customer's account would not be settled until the acceptance cleared at his bank on the date due. If, after taking his \$5,000 acceptance we were to give him another \$5,000 worth of goods on open account, we merely would be doubling his limit without any sort of security.

From the standpoint of the B. F. Goodrich Company alone, therefore, the use of the trade acceptance would involve additional operating detail and additional expense, with an actual slowing up of our collection methods and an increase in risks.

From the standpoint of the salesman in the field, the trade acceptance is a mean thing to handle, because at the time he takes the order the salesman is compelling the buyer to think definitely and specifically about paying the bill. The chances are if an order is taken for a thousand dollars and then the salesman asks the customer to sign an acceptance for a thousand dollars, that in many cases the customer will wish to be on the safe side of things and will actually cut down the amount of the order placed with us. Further, if we are to place upon the salesman in the field the burden of explaining a trade acceptance plan to customers, we are going to make it necessary for him to spend a good part of his time selling this part of the program to customers—the time which might otherwise be devoted directly to producing orders.

## CHAPTER 40

### OUTSIDE COLLECTION AGENCIES

**Extra Pressure.**—When its most vigorous and persistent collection methods have failed to bring the debtor to the point of payment, the credit department plays its last trump—turning the account over to some third party for collection. This may be an attorney, a collector specializing in accounts in a particular industry, or the collection department of a mercantile agency, credit insurance company, trade or credit association.

The reason for the success of such agencies in many cases where efficiently managed credit departments have failed is largely psychological. The debtor is familiar with both the personnel and the methods of the credit department, and this familiarity has bred, if not contempt, at least a certain amount of callousness and a feeling that so long as the collection process remains in the hands of the credit department nothing very serious is going to happen.

With the entry of the third party, however, the whole situation undergoes a radical change. The debtor is generally unacquainted with the new collector and his methods. He realizes that his delinquency is no longer a secret between the creditor and himself. He knows that whereas the credit department had two objectives—to collect the money and keep the account on the books—the new collector has but one, which is to collect the money. Finally, he understands perfectly that the collector will not hesitate to take whatever steps are necessary in order to enforce payment.

**Collection by Attorney.**—The attorney may enter the collection program in any one of several ways. If the account is referred to a collection agency, the agency tries first to collect by correspondence from the home office of the agency direct to the debtor, beginning with the use of some such form as:

Dear Sir:

The . . . . . Company of . . . . . has turned over to us for collection a claim against you in the amount of \$ . . . . .

With the claim, the . . . . . Company has sent us the complete file of correspondence bearing on your indebtedness.

As this account is now . . . . . past due, we have to inform you that unless we receive a remittance of \$ . . . . . from you on or before . . . . ., we shall immediately start suit to enforce payment.

Very truly yours,

. . . . . COLLECTION AGENCY

If this and the follow-up letters bring no result, the agency forwards the claim to its correspondent attorney in the city where the debtor resides, and the attorney attempts collection by letter, telephone message, or personal call.

The creditor may, however, work directly through an attorney without using a collection agency. In this case, he picks out a lawyer in his own city who specializes in collection work, and turns the account over to him. The lawyer tries direct correspondence first, and if this is not successful he forwards the claim to a correspondent attorney in the debtor's city. Or, if the creditor prefers, he may himself forward the claim direct to a lawyer in the city where the debtor lives, selecting the attorney's name from a "law list," of which several are available at a moderate price.

**Charges for Collection by Attorney.**—In most cases, the fees charged by attorneys for collection services are governed by the schedule of rates adopted by the Commercial Law League of America, as follows:

Effective January 1st, 1938

15 per cent on the first \$500.

10 per cent on the excess of \$500.

Minimum commission \$7.50.

On items of \$15.00, or less, 50 per cent.

For suit: A suit fee, of not less than \$7.50 to be added to commissions, the whole not to exceed 50 per cent of the amount of the claim. Suit fees are not contingent.

While the Commercial Law League rates apply generally throughout the United States, members of the bar in a few cities have adopted their own schedules of collection rates. These are usually a little higher than the fees called for in the C. L. L. A. schedule. In all cases it is understood that the attorney is bound to make every possible effort to collect without starting suit, involving the creditor in legal expense.

**Collection Fees on Retail Accounts.**—Because of the greater difficulty involved in securing payment on retail and instalment accounts, many attorneys and collection agencies will refuse to accept claims on the basis of Commercial Law League rates. The charges usually range from 25 per cent for all accounts which are settled without personal calls in litigation to as high as 33-50 per cent for all other claims. If an account is forwarded by a collection agency or attorney, the practice is for the forwarder to retain one-third of any fee collected and give the receiving agency two-thirds.

**Use of Forwarders.**—Because of the reluctance of both attorneys and collection agencies to handle small and to them unprofitable accounts, direct forwarding by the creditor has been replaced by the use of the collection agency. Because the local attorney is receiving other business from the forwarder, better service is secured by the creditor and at no greater cost to his concern.

**Types of Collection Agencies.**—Collection departments are operated by the general and special mercantile agencies, the credit insurance companies, many trade associations and trade groups, the National Association of Credit Men (for manufacturers and wholesalers), and the National Retail Credit Association (for retailers). While most of these are trustworthy, the credit department should exercise extreme care in selecting the agency to which it is to turn over its delinquent accounts, particularly as the courts do not appear to be in agreement as to whether the relationship between the creditor and the agency becomes a creditor-debtor relation as soon as the agency has made a collection on an account, or whether the relationship is merely that of principal and agent.

## FINAL NOTICE

TO \_\_\_\_\_

EVERY COURTESY HAS BEEN EXTENDED TO YOU IN THE MATTER  
OF YOUR PAST DUE ACCOUNT OF \$.....

WE ARE COMPELLED TO TAKE ACTION TO PROTECT OUR INTERESTS BY INSTRUCTING  
THE SERVICE CORPORATION OF THE ASSOCIATION OF CREDIT MEN TO PROCEED WITH PROMPT  
COLLECTION UNLESS PAYMENT REACHES US ON OR BEFORE \_\_\_\_\_

WE URGE THAT YOU TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THIS OPPORTUNITY TO SETTLE DIRECT  
WITH US.

COPY TO  
THE SERVICE CORPORATION  
OF THE ASSOCIATION OF CREDIT MEN  
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE BLDG.  
NEWARK, N. J.  
*(Subsidiary of the National Association of Credit Men)*

CLAIM BLANK — Mail IMMEDIATELY { THE SERVICE CORPORATION  
with statement to { OF THE ASSOCIATION OF CREDIT MEN  
Chamber of Commerce Bldg. — Newark, N. J.

WE HAVE THIS DATE MAILED ABOVE DEBTOR YOUR FINAL NOTICE RELATIVE TO PAY-  
MENT OF ACCOUNT AMOUNTING TO \$.....

THIS IS YOUR AUTHORITY TO PROCEED WITH COLLECTION, BEGINNING WITH THE  
CLASS OF SERVICE AND CHARGES CHECKED BELOW, UNLESS WE RECEIVE PAYMENT AND  
SO ADVISE YOU, ON OR BEFORE \_\_\_\_\_

## OFFICE SERVICE



Two (2%) per cent  
Minimum Charge \$1.00

## BUREAU SERVICE



First \$50 — 10%  
Over \$50 — 5%  
Minimum Charge \$3.00

## PERSONAL SERVICE



First \$40 — 15%  
Over \$40 — 10%  
Minimum Charge \$1.50  
Claims of \$15 or less, 50%

NO COLLECTION — NO CHARGE

WE AGREE AND UNDERSTAND THAT ANY PAYMENTS RECEIVED BY US AFTER EXPIRATION DATE OF FINAL NOTICE WILL BE  
SUBJECT TO YOUR REGULAR SCHEDULE OF CHARGES. NO ADDITIONAL EXPENSES TO BE INCURRED WITHOUT OUR AUTHORITY.

Figure 22. Service Corporation Final Notice and Claim Blank

**Credit Association Collection Service.**—In on respect the collection departments operated by the two national credit associations appear to have an advantage over the other collection agencies. When a credit department turns an account over to an attorney, or to an ordinary agency, it means an open break between creditor and debtor. Diplomatic relations are definitely at an end. This is not necessarily the case if the account is given to a credit association collecting department. Vigorous collection methods are used, but there is still an attempt to save the goodwill of the debtor for the benefit of the creditor, and in many cases the attempt is successful.

**Association Collection Methods.**—In the National Association of Credit Men the collection work is closely tied in with the operations of the Adjustment Bureaus of which there are 60 in the principal cities of the United States. To meet certain legal requirements and to extend the scope of collection efforts to non-members of the association, the Service Corporation of the Association of Credit Men has been established as a subsidiary of the National Association of Credit Men.

Like many of the Adjustment Bureaus still handling collections, the Service Corporation features a free demand notice which has been found to be effective in 40 per cent of the cases where it was used. This high rate of return is due to the prestige and the influence of the N. A. C. M.

Each user of the service is supplied with a book of "Free Final Demand Notices," which contains blank forms of (1) final notice, (2) claim blank, and (3) creditor's copy.

The final notice is mailed from the credit department directly to the debtor, and at the same time the claim blank is sent to the Service Corporation. A definite date is set by which time payment must be received or the second step in the collection process is set in motion.

This is designated as office service and consists of an emphatic collection letter from the Service Corporation. If payment is effected the charge is 2 per cent of the amount collected with a minimum of \$1.00. However, if no result is secured after five days the claim will automatically pass into Bureau Service.



Here telegraphic or telephone demand is made by the Service Corporation and/or affiliated bureaus. If successful the charge is 10 per cent on the first \$300 collected and 5 per cent on the excess with a \$3.00 minimum.

Again if five days pass without result, the claim passes automatically into the Personal Service.

Now personal attention is given by experienced representatives. The charges for collection are 15 per cent on the first \$500, 10 per cent on all over \$500, with a minimum charge of \$7.50 except on claims of \$15.00 or less where 50 per cent is the fee.

The marked success of this type of collection effort is due to the fact that it is used on claims which are not more than six months overdue and which in the majority of cases are between 60 and 90 days delinquent.

**Cleveland Favors Personal Calls.**—Another National Association of Credit Men unit which makes extensive use of the "free final demand" service is the Cleveland Association of Credit Men. The collection department uses, in addition to the free demand blanks, a series of collection letters, personal demand service "on the street," and attorney service. Hugh Wells, manager of the Adjustment Bureau, reports that the best results are secured by "personal calls, followed by a sincere threat of suit."

**Notice by Letter.**—In some associations, N. A. C. M. members make the "final demand" on their own letterheads, and, if it is not successful, follow it up with a letter such as:

Gentlemen:

As we have received no reply to our letter of . . . . ., in which we advised you that it would be necessary to take further action in the collection of your account unless we received your remittance by . . . . ., we are today placing your account with the Portland Association of Credit Men for collection.

Very truly yours,

B. P. JOIN FURNITURE CORPORATION

By T. C. McIntire  
Treasurer

**Credit Insurance Company Collection Service.**—The method used by the collection departments of credit insurance companies is, in general, similar to that followed by other collection agencies. That is to say, it begins with correspondence and, if that is not successful, proceeds to the stage of collection by attorney.

In its first contact the company approaches the debtor by means of a letter such as the following:

Dear Sir:

The . . . . . Company of . . . . . has brought to our attention a claim they have against you on an account amounting to \$. . . . ., which is . . . . . overdue.

The credit manager of the company informs us that he and the members of his staff have made repeated efforts to collect the amount due, sending you statements on . . . . . and letters on . . . . ., but that these efforts have been without success.

Our company issues policies securing the holders against loss on delinquent accounts, and under such a policy the insured is required to report to us all customers who are not paying their accounts as they mature.

You will readily appreciate the fact that we cannot continue this protection on debtors who do not meet their obligations. Bills must be paid promptly in order to insure a good credit standing, and in cases where this is not done we have no choice but to resort to such methods as are necessary in order to enforce payment.

You will also appreciate the fact that our records of the paying habits of customers are our guide in insuring credits all over the country, and it is decidedly to your advantage to have your record clear.

We therefore request that you mail immediately, either to us or direct to your creditor, check for \$. . . . . to cover the account.

If this is not done, we shall be compelled to hand the claim over to our attorneys for action.

Very truly yours,

For two reasons this letter is frequently so effective that the attorneys' services are not needed. First, it comes from a company whose exact powers and functions are not clearly understood by the debtor. The element of fear is all the stronger because the debtor is uncertain as to just what is hanging over him. Second, there is the threat, disguised very

thinly if at all, that in some way his delinquencies may be advertised to the entire business world. The fifth paragraph of the letter generally moves him, if the preceding ones have failed to do so.

**Trade Association Collections.**—The establishment of collection departments in the national trade associations is a comparatively recent development. Collection pressure from this source is particularly effective because the debtor is generally disposed to put a high value on his relations with the other members of his group. He wishes to have a good reputation with his associates, or at least to avoid acquiring a bad one.

Most of the trade associations maintain what is generally referred to as a "black list," containing the names of customers who are, for one reason or another, considered undesirable credit risks. The use of such a list must, of course, be carefully safeguarded. Trade association and trade group executives who are required to establish and maintain such lists have to be constantly on the watch against illegal practices, and possible disciplinary action on the part of the Federal Trade Commission.

The "black list" serves two distinct purposes. First, it informs credit departments as to just which accounts should be given a particularly rigorous credit appraisal. This enables the credit manager to lock the barn before the horse has been stolen. Second, it has a decidedly wholesome deterrent effect on the customer who has an established credit rating. He knows that there is such a list, and if he does not meet his bills in accordance with the stipulated terms, his name is sure to be added to the roll of dishonor. The list therefore becomes a valuable aid to efficient collection.

**Collection by Bank Draft.**—Under the heading, "Cooperation with the Bank," the matter of collection by bank draft was briefly referred to in Chapter 16. A more detailed description of the use of this collection instrument was reserved for presentation at this point.

Credit managers are not in agreement as to just what part this instrument should play in the collection process. In cer-

tain lines of business it is used almost at the beginning of the program. In others it is regarded as a rather severe measure, and its use is delayed as long as possible, being resorted to only when all other devices except the threat of collection by attorney have been tried on the debtor.

Probably the majority of credit managers take the latter position, largely on the ground that use of the draft discloses the status of the creditor-debtor relationship to a third party, and this is generally so distasteful to the debtor that whatever goodwill still survives is seriously threatened. The debtor's dislike of the measure is easy to understand. Unless general use of the draft is an accepted tradition in the trade, it is anything but a vote of confidence.

In handling the draft for the creditor, the bank becomes, in effect, his collection agency. On the whole, this agency is not as effective as it once was. Two or three decades ago a customer who failed to honor a draft was considered an "undesirable citizen," from the credit point of view. It cannot be said that the same holds true now. Drafts are refused and ignored every business day, with no great damage to the refuser's credit title. There are, however, still plenty of merchants who have so much respect for the instrument, if not actual fear of it, that even the threat of it is enough to bring them into line.

**A Choice of Banks.**—The credit manager who decides to use the draft has a choice of several methods. First, he may send it to his own bank, and start the collection process there. If he knows the debtor's bank (and from handling checks he is likely to have this information), he may send it there for collection. Or he may send it to a bank in the debtor's city, but not the one in which the debtor has his account.

Many credit managers use the first method because they feel that their own bank is in the best position to handle the draft successfully. Presumably the bank has a correspondent in the debtor's city, but even if it has not, the drawee bank will be disposed to give it better attention if it comes from a bank rather than from a mercantile concern.

The second plan is favored by those who believe that the debtor will be more responsive if the draft comes to him through his own bank. But this may or may not be the case. It may easily happen that the debtor's own bank will be just the one to discourage his honoring the draft, which is precisely the reason why the third plan has so many followers among credit managers. Under the second plan, the credit manager frequently has to send a "tracer" letter in order to find out what has become of the draft. Under the third plan, he rarely has to do so.

**Charges for Collection of Drafts.**—For many years it was not customary for banks to make a charge for handling drafts unless payment was effected, in which case a collection charge was made. As some credit managers now frankly admit, the "free presentation" idea was somewhat overworked, and the general practice now is for banks to charge a small fee (ordinarily 25 cents) for presentation. The practice has become so firmly established that many credit departments enclose the fee with the draft, as a matter of course, and some send also a letter of instructions and a stamped return envelope. It is also considered good practice to write the debtor a day or two before sending the draft, informing him that it is to be sent and that he will be expected to honor it unless he prefers to send a check in settlement of the account.

**Drafts Returned Unpaid.**—If the draft is not honored, the bank returns it with a notation such as "payment refused," "has mailed check," "will mail check on . . . . .," or "disputes the account." Even such information as this may be worth all it costs the credit department, as the bank's notations frequently help the credit manager to decide what step to take next.

**Second Draft.**—Some credit departments make a practice of sending a second draft if the first is not honored. Others send a vigorous telegram or use the telephone in an attempt to spur the debtor into action. At first thought the sending of a second draft seems a futile procedure, but so many credit

departments do it, the presumption is that it must be worth while.

**Putting Accounts up for Sale.**—In concluding this discussion of outside collection agencies, there is one practice of certain agencies against which every credit manager should be warned. This is the promotion of a collection scheme which includes a series of form letters, the last of which advises the debtor that unless he makes payment by a certain date the account will be "offered for public sale."

Accounts receivable are, of course, property, and the owner has a right to sell his own property if he wishes to do so. But there is a good reason why owners of accounts receivable should refuse to be led into this particular sales scheme, which is merely a collection scheme in a very flimsy disguise.

The courts of Louisiana, Iowa, Minnesota, Ontario, and British Columbia have held that the listing of a person's name as a delinquent and advertising the indebtedness for sale is, *per se*, a libelous act. In three cases in the United States and two in Canada, while the exact circumstances differed slightly, it was held that the purpose of advertising the accounts for sale was not the bona fide sale of the accounts but rather that the intent was to enforce and compel payment.

An analysis of the Canadian cases in the *Credit Manual of Commercial Laws* shows that where large yellow posters advertising a number of accounts for sale, including that of the plaintiff, were posted by a collection agency conspicuously in several parts of the city in which the plaintiff lived, it was held that the posters were intended to compel the debtor to pay. It was further held that the necessary and intended consequence of such posting was to injure and defame the plaintiff's reputation; to degrade him and subject him to annoyance, ridicule and disgrace; to make him appear guilty of fraud and dishonesty, and unworthy of trust; and the advertisement implied either that the debtor was insolvent or that he was the sort of person from whom a just account could not be collected by ordinary means. The publication was held libelous *per se*.

In the Minnesota case (*Traynor vs. Sielaff*), it was held that the listing of a person's name as a delinquent is not privileged where it is shown that the real purpose of publication is to coerce the plaintiff to pay a disputed bill, rather than for the protection of the defendant's private interests.

In the Louisiana case (*Tuyes vs. Chambers*), it was established that the collection agency distributed copies of the list by mail in the debtor's own locality, and this "publication" was also held libelous. In giving his decision on this case, the presiding Justice said that "there was sufficient publication through the issuance, handling and mailing by the collection agency in the manner disclosed in the record. The manager of the concern testified that both it and the defendant mailed to the plaintiff the first and second demands as well as the list of delinquents. We are convinced that the whole was a general scheme to force the plaintiff to pay money, by threatening to humiliate her by public exposure, and that this was the underlying basis of the system about which the witness testifies. The threat to place the list on merchants' display windows, and to advertise for sale, etc., could have but one purpose, and that is, through fear, to induce the payment of money which could not otherwise be collected."

In the law of libel it is a well-established rule that truth is a complete defense to an action for civil libel, but "the justification must be as broad as the charge." The decisions indicate that the advertising of accounts for sale can be justified only by proving:

1. That the exact amount indicated is due and unpaid.
2. That the debtor is unworthy of trust and credit and is not amenable to the ordinary methods of collection.

Credit managers who are approached by collection agencies in connection with a plan involving the advertising of accounts for sale should keep in mind two important facts: that this double burden of proof will prove difficult, and in many cases impossible; and, most important of all, that *the creditor is held responsible for the act of the collection agency in advertising the account.*

## CHAPTER 41

### LEGAL ASPECTS OF COLLECTIONS

**The Credit Department and the Law.**—While it is possible for one to be a capable credit manager without having had legal training or experience, the credit executive must be familiar with at least the basic principles of commercial law. When the collection process reaches the stage where legal action is required, the credit manager will engage the services of an attorney, but he should know just when this should be done, exactly what the attorney can do, and what help the attorney needs from the credit department in order to insure a successful outcome of the proceedings.

Under the law, the creditor has certain rights which enable him to collect money due him, or to get back property for which money is owed. Among these legal aids to creditors are the unpaid seller's lien, attachment, garnishment, replevin, stoppage in transit, the right of rescission, the bulk sales law, and the bad check law. Each will be discussed in this chapter.

**Unpaid Seller's Lien.**—A lien is the right one has to hold, control, retain, or enforce a charge against the property of another until some claim of the former is paid or satisfied. A seller is held to be unpaid if:

1. He has received no remittance covering goods sold.
2. The buyer has given him, in exchange for the goods, a bad check or a bad note.

In certain circumstances, the seller can refuse to deliver goods even though he has sold them and title has passed to the buyer. This right, known as the "unpaid seller's lien," holds in cases where merchandise has been sold without any arrangement for credit terms, when the stipulated terms have not been met, or when the buyer becomes insolvent.



The Uniform Sales Act, which has been followed in many of the states, sets forth the general principles governing the unpaid seller's lien. In cases where an unpaid seller has made partial delivery, he may exercise his right of lien on the remainder, unless the part delivery has been made under such circumstances as to show an intent to waive the lien or right of retention. Under the Uniform Sales Act, the unpaid seller loses his lien when :

1. He delivers the goods to a carrier or other bailee for transmission to the buyer without reserving title or property in the goods or right to possession thereof.
2. The buyer or his agent lawfully gets possession of goods.
3. The seller waives the lien.

**Attachment.**—Attachment is a statutory right which the seller may claim only on grounds specifically set up in each state. In most of the states he may resort to this right under the following circumstances :

1. When the debtor is a non-resident of the state (not county) where the writ of attachment is sought against the debtor's property located within the state.
2. When the debtor has left the state with intent to defraud creditors or avoid service of legal process.
3. When the debtor with like intent keeps himself concealed within the boundaries of the state.
4. When the debtor has removed property or is about to dispose of it for the purpose of defrauding his creditors.
5. When the debtor has secured property from the creditor by fraudulent representations, such as the making of a false statement in writing regarding his financial condition.

**Garnishment.**—This is another statutory remedy. In most states, when a debtor has transferred property for the purpose of defrauding a creditor, the latter may hold the transferee liable, as trustee, to account for the property or its proceeds. As this process of garnishment involves a third party beside the buyer and seller, it is known in some states as "third-party proceedings."

In the various states there is wide variation in the laws covering the right of garnishment. In some, action may be brought only after an execution against the original debtor has been returned unsatisfied. In others, the creditor is required simply to serve, on the person in whose hands the plaintiff believes there is money or property belonging to the debtor, a copy of the writ of attachment. In certain states garnishment is limited to actions on contract, and excluded in actions in tort.

**Replevin.**—The seller may repossess, under the right known as replevin, goods obtained by fraud (as, for example, on the basis of a false financial statement). Even after the buyer has gone into bankruptcy and his estate has been taken over by a receiver or trustee, the seller may exercise this right. In this action the seller maintains that because of the fraud, title to the property never passed to the buyer. But the burden of proof is on the seller, and he must also provide, as in the case of attachment, a bond securing the purchaser against any injury resulting from the replevin process.

This is one of the most flexible of all legal remedies available for the creditor, since the right extends not only to merchandise but also to checks, notes and bonds. The credit department should understand clearly the two chief points in connection with the replevin process :

1. It must be based on fraud.
2. Burden of proof of fraud rests on the seller.

**Stoppage in Transit.**—This is one of the most frequently invoked of all the rights of the creditor. When a seller turns goods over to a carrier for transportation to a buyer, he ordinarily loses his right of the unpaid seller's lien. But there is one exception to this general rule. If the buyer becomes insolvent while the goods are being transported, the seller may exercise the right of stoppage in transit.

In so doing the seller may regain *possession* of the goods, but not *title* to them. The seller exercises the right by giving reasonable notice to the carrier, allowing the latter time in which to locate the goods and put the stoppage order into effect.

Goods are regarded as being "in transit" from the time they are received by the carrier until they are delivered to the buyer or his agent by the carrier or other bailee.

The seller does not have to prove that the buyer is actually insolvent. All he must show is that the buyer has either stopped paying his debts or is in such a position that he cannot pay them as they become due.

**Rescission.**—Under this right, the seller may rescind a sale and recover title from the buyer. Rescission may be invoked on any one of these grounds:

1. If the right has been expressly reserved to the seller upon default of the buyer.
2. If the buyer has been in default of payment for more than a reasonable time.
3. If the buyer has breached or repudiated the sales contract, or given evidence of inability to perform his part of it.

Rescission calls for some "overt act" on the part of the seller, by which his intention to rescind is communicated to the buyer. After having met this requirement and rescinded the sale, the seller does not have to account to the buyer for any profits realized on resale, but he may bring action against the buyer for damages suffered because of the default, including the loss of his anticipated profit.

**Bulk Sales Law.**—While references to a "Bulk Sales Act" are frequently made, there is no federal law bearing on the defrauding of creditors by secret sale in bulk of a merchant's stock of goods. However, every state and most of the provinces of Canada have enacted statutes governing bulk sales. These statutes are designed, not to prevent a merchant from selling his entire stock of merchandise and fixtures to another, but only to require that the intention to make such a sale shall be made known in time to give the creditors of the seller ample opportunity to protect their interests. In most of the states, such notice must be given personally or by registered mail, but in some it is required only that notice of the intended transfer be recorded. A few states go so far as to require that the

purchaser shall apply the purchase price to the satisfaction of the debts of the seller.

**Bad Check Law.**—Under laws enacted by most of the states, a maker who issues, and the holder, whether maker or not, who negotiates a check knowing that there are insufficient funds or credit behind it, is guilty of a crime. Most of these statutes provide that proof that a check, draft, or order was made, drawn, uttered, or delivered and that payment thereof was refused by the drawee because of lack of funds or credit, establishes a *prima facie* case of intent to defraud and of knowledge of insufficient funds in, or credit with, the bank.

While these statutes afford an ample basis for prosecution, credit departments should proceed with caution in all bad check cases. The best practice is to send, on receipt of a bad check, a notice to the maker, demanding that the check be made good within the number of days specified in the statute. Such notice is required in most states, and if the check is not made good after demand, the credit manager should consult with the district attorney of the city in which the check was made and delivered.

On account of uncertainty concerning the application of statutes to post-dated checks, or checks given in payment of existing indebtedness, the holder of such a check should never risk having the maker arrested without a grand jury indictment. Such a course might easily lead to a dismissal of the prosecution and an action for false imprisonment or malicious prosecution.

**Insolvency.**—Every state has some form of insolvency law, under which a debtor may turn over his property to a third party for the purpose of disposal and pro rata division of the proceeds among his creditors. These laws are not uniform, the requirements in some states being far more exacting than those in others.

In certain states an act of assignment automatically releases a debtor from further liability. In others it does not. In most states, however, the law provides that the assignment

must be recorded in the clerk's office in county in which debtor resides or has his principal place of business, and a sworn schedule (list of creditors and inventory of the property) must be filed.

The administration of the estate is carried out by the assignee under the supervision of, and subject to the discretion vested in, the insolvency judge, who can authorize the filing of suit for the recovery of property transferred to defraud creditors; the payment of dividends; and approval of composition settlements. The insolvency judge may also restrain the debtor or witnesses from leaving the jurisdiction, and may, in fact, exercise virtually all powers vested in a court of equity.

**Bankruptcy.**—Considered broadly, bankruptcy is the condition of a debtor who cannot or who does not intend to meet his obligations. Strictly, however, it is the state or condition of a debtor who has been adjudged a bankrupt by a bankruptcy court, which is a Federal Court sitting under the National Bankruptcy Act. Actions in bankruptcy are begun by the filing of a petition, either by the debtor or by one or more of his creditors, asking for an order adjudging debtor a bankrupt.

According to the June, 1938 amendment to the Federal Bankruptcy Act, "any person except a municipal, railroad, insurance, or banking corporation, or a building and loan association, shall be entitled to the benefits of this act as a voluntary bankrupt." The purpose of the law is, first, to effect a distribution of the bankrupt's assets equitably among the creditors, and second, to discharge him from the burden of all obligations (except those not affected by discharge) remaining after the distribution of his assets. All persons, including corporations, excepting the classes of corporations and associations mentioned above, may file with the court a petition to be adjudged voluntary bankrupts. Involuntary bankruptcy may be forced upon a debtor by any creditor or creditors who, after filing their petition, can prove that at any time within four months after filing the debtor had committed any act of bankruptcy.

**Acts of Bankruptcy.**—The acts of bankruptcy are six in number, as follows:

1. Conveyances, transfers, concealments, or removals with intent to hinder, delay, or defraud creditors.
2. Intentional preferences to creditors while insolvent.
3. Failing, while insolvent, to discharge creditors' liens.
4. Assignments for the benefit of creditors.
5. Permitting appointment of receiver or trustee while insolvent or unable to pay debts as they mature.
6. Admission in writing of inability to pay one's debts and willingness to be adjudged a bankrupt on that ground.

**Progressive Steps in Bankruptcy.**—The following is adapted from the *Credit Manual* of the National Association of Credit Men and revised according to provisions of the Chandler Act:

1. **FILING OF THE PETITION.** Petitions in bankruptcy are classified as either voluntary or involuntary, depending on whether the petition is filed by the bankrupt himself or by his creditors. An involuntary petition may be filed by three creditors having liquidated claims, fixed as to liability, aggregating \$500 or more, but if there are less than twelve creditors a single creditor with a claim of \$500 or more may file petition.

2. **THE SCHEDULES.** The schedules setting forth the facts regarding the debtor's assets and liabilities must be filed in court with the petition in the case of a voluntary bankrupt and within five days after adjudication for an involuntary bankrupt.

3. **ADJUDICATION IN BANKRUPTCY.** Adjudication that the debtor is a bankrupt takes place generally after a hearing in the case of a voluntary petition; in the case of an involuntary petition, the debtor upon filing a written application is first entitled to a trial by jury or if he waives it, adjudication takes place after the ten days following the service upon the debtor of a subpoena in the proceedings.

4. **DESIGNATION OF REFEREE.** The proceedings are generally referred to a referee who has the jurisdiction to perform those duties concerning the administration of the estate that are conferred by the Bankruptcy Act on Courts of Bankruptcy except in cases in which he is directly or indirectly interested. The acts of the referee are subject to review by the judge of the court under which the referee performs his duties.

5. **APPOINTMENT OF RECEIVER.** The receiver in bank-

ruptcy may be appointed by the court at any time after the filing of the petition. The statute permits the appointment in case of necessity upon application of a party in interest. The receiver's function is to receive and preserve the bankrupt's assets, and his appointment usually follows where there is danger of waste, neglect or fraud if bankrupt remains in possession.

6. **QUALIFICATION OF RECEIVER.** In order to qualify as receiver, the individual appointed must file a bond in such amount as the court may direct, conditioned for the faithful performance of his duties.

7. **EXAMINATION OF THE BANKRUPT UNDER SEC. 21(a).** The receiver usually asks the district judge to make an order for the examination of the bankrupt, and others, with a view to discovering assets, immediately after his appointment and qualification. Creditors may, with the consent of the receiver, participate in this examination, or may themselves make application for leave to conduct such an examination.

8. **FIRST MEETING OF CREDITORS.** The first meeting of creditors, for the election of a trustee and the examination of the bankrupt, is to be held not less than ten nor more than thirty days after adjudication. Such meeting is normally adjourned from time to time until examination is completed.

9. **RECEIVER'S REPORT.** The receiver files a final report of his proceedings, and the report, with the receiver's and his attorney's application for allowances, is approved or disapproved, at a special meeting of creditors called for that purpose, and the receiver discharged on surrendering to the trustee the property constituting the estate.

10. **ELECTION OF TRUSTEE.** The trustee in bankruptcy is elected at the first meeting of creditors. The choice of the trustee is determined by a majority in number and amount of the creditors with allowed claims, who are present in person or by attorney or proxy, subject to the approval of the referee.

11. **QUALIFICATION OF TRUSTEE.** In order to qualify as trustee, the individual appointed must file a bond in such amount as the court may direct, conditioned for the faithful performance of his duties.

12. **PROOF OF CLAIMS.** Claims duly verified in accordance

with the act may be filed at any time within six months after adjudication. The trustee in behalf of the creditors or any individual creditor may file objections against any claim.

13. APPRAISAL AND SALE OF BANKRUPT'S PROPERTY. The court appoints a competent and disinterested appraiser and for sufficient cause additional appraisers to appraise all property of the bankrupt estate and to file a report of appraisal with the court. The receiver or trustee then may enter an order for sale. Unless the ensuing sale is for 75 per cent of the appraised value, it may be set aside on application by the creditors.

14. TRANSFER OF PROPERTY. After bankruptcy and before adjudication of that bankruptcy, or before a receiver takes possession, a bankrupt may transfer his property, other than real estate, for a fair value, to a person acting in good faith.

15. FINAL MEETING OF CREDITORS. The final meeting of creditors is held whenever the estate is ready to be closed, which may be at any time after the expiration of four months after adjudication. At this meeting the trustee presents his final account and the trustee's attorney files his request for allowances which are passed on by the referee. However, a no asset case may close without a meeting.

16. DIVIDENDS. The first dividend paid to creditors must be declared within thirty days after adjudication if there are funds at hand sufficient to pay 5 per cent or more of the claims which have been, or probably will be, allowed. Subsequent dividends may be declared as often as there is 10 per cent or more for distribution. The first dividend may not include more than 50 per cent of the money of the estate in excess of the amount necessary to pay priority claims. The final dividend may not be declared sooner than three months after the first dividend. After the final dividend has been paid by the referee, the trustee's bond is canceled and the trust discharged.

17. DISCHARGE OF THE BANKRUPT. The adjudication of any person other than a corporation operates as an application for discharge. A corporation may file application for a discharge six months after adjudication.

18. OBJECTIONS TO DISCHARGE. Parties in interest, who have in no way been guilty of undue delay, have the right to



file with the court, within one year from the date of the granting of a discharge, an application to revoke it, if it can be shown that it was obtained through the fraud of the bankrupt and that such knowledge was not had by the petitioners until after the discharge had been granted.

19. ARRANGEMENTS. An arrangement is "any plan of a debtor for the settlement, satisfaction, or extension of the time of payment of his unsecured debts, upon any terms." By the amendment of June, 1938, any person who is entitled to the benefits of the Bankruptcy Act, who is a debtor, may file a petition for an arrangement. When bankruptcy is pending, a petition may be filed before or after adjudication. If there is no bankruptcy proceeding pending, the debtor is permitted to file with the court an original petition for adjudication. The debtor must present with his petition a statement of the executory contracts in addition to the schedules and statements of affairs if these last have not already been done in previously started bankruptcy proceedings. The mere filing of the petition will not act as a stay of adjudication or of administration of the estate under bankruptcy proceedings. In order to obtain a stay, it is necessary for the debtor to apply separately to the court, whereupon the stay will be issued to the extent needed to protect the estate. When no bankruptcy proceeding is pending, the court may order the debtor to file a bond to indemnify the estate against possible, subsequent loss. If he fails to comply, the court has the authority to adjudge him a bankrupt or to dismiss altogether the petition for arrangement according to which is for the best interest of the creditors.

A referee may be appointed by the judge to administer the disposition of the case. If necessary, a receiver may be appointed to control the property of the debtor, or, if a trustee is already in possession, he may be ordered to continue in his duties. In addition, one or more appraisers may be summoned by the court to determine the inventory and evaluate the property of the debtor; the court determining how such inventory and appraisal is to be made. Finally, a meeting of creditors is promptly called; a notice, with a summary of liabilities and assets, being mailed to debtor, creditors, and others interested.

At the meeting of creditors, either the judge or the referee appointed presides, receiving the creditors' proofs of claims and examining the debtor on all matters relevant to the arrangement. It is the usual procedure at such a meeting for the judge or referee, whoever is presiding, to appoint the receiver or trustee who will handle the estate. Upon his appointment, the receiver or trustee is required to give a bond in the amount fixed by the court in order to safeguard the estate of the debtor while it is in his custody. Subject to the control of the court, the person appointed to handle the debtor's property may operate the business. He must file reports on his management from time to time as the court may designate. If no receiver or trustee is appointed, the debtor continues to enjoy the possession of his property, but in the same capacity as that of a trustee appointed by the court.

Creditors have practically the same rights under an arrangement as they have under the regular bankruptcy proceeding. The creditors may be fixed into classes and, in the event of disagreement over the classification, the court, after a proper hearing, has the authority to summarily determine the controversy.

An arrangement which all the creditors accept in writing is confirmed by the court immediately upon the deposit by the debtor of all money and evidences of debt. But if there has not been such a unanimous acceptance, an application must be filed with the court after the plan has been accepted by the majority of all the creditors. The court will confirm an arrangement only when it is fully satisfied that all the provisions are complied with, that it is for the best interests of the creditors, that it is equitable, that the debtor has not failed to perform his duties, and that the proposal and its acceptance by the creditors are in good faith.

Upon confirmation, the arrangement becomes binding on the debtor and all his creditors whether they have accepted it or not. The money and the evidences of debt (stock, beneficial interests in property, etc.) are distributed to those persons entitled to it. The confirmation of an arrangement acts as a full discharge of the bankrupt from all of his debts as scheduled.

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